



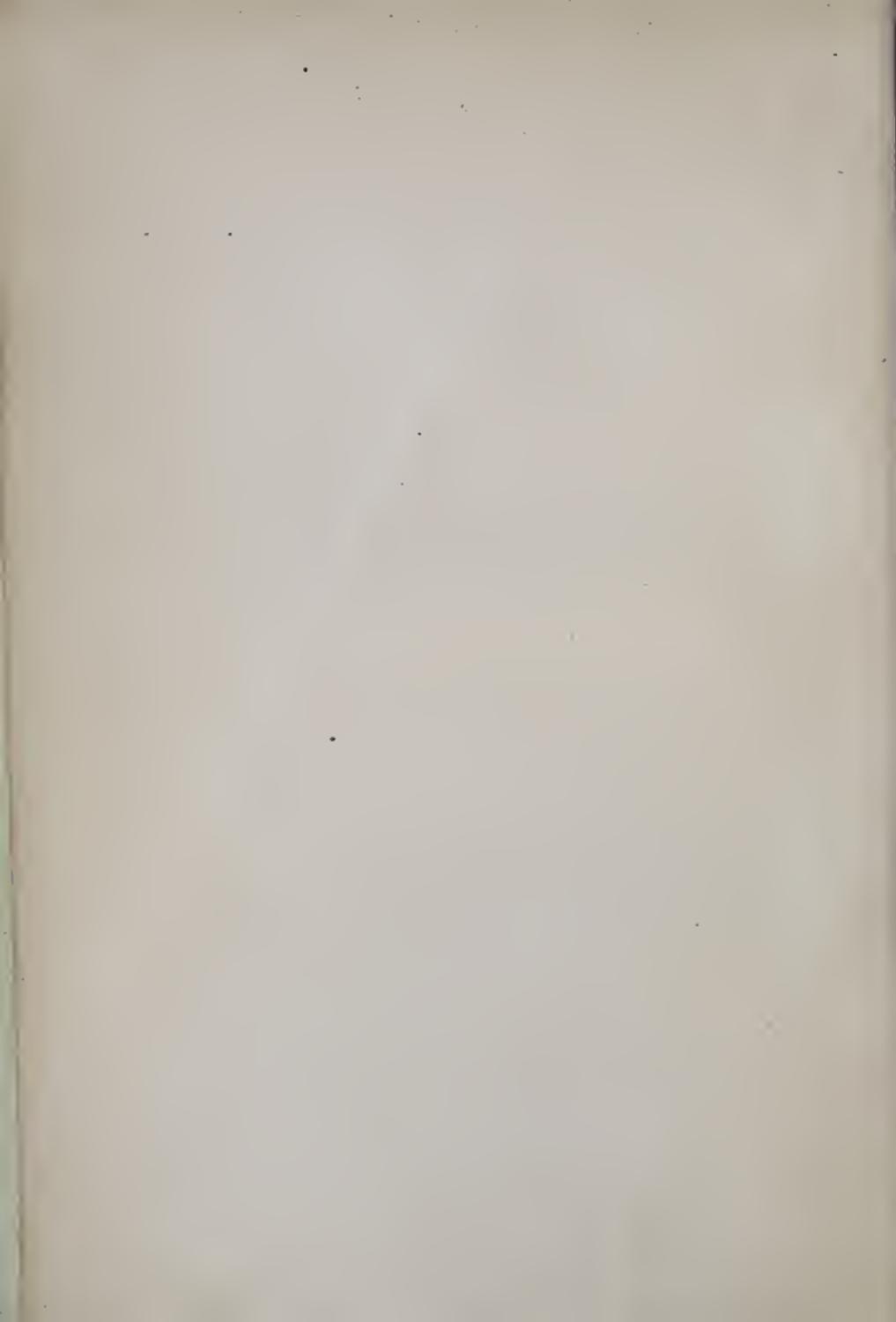
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JACK AND THE OSTRICH.

Price 6d.

JAKE AND HIS OSTRICH

by *Frank Slocum*

Illustrated by *Frank Slocum*

McGraw-Hill Book Company

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JACK AND HIS OSTRICH

An African Story

BY

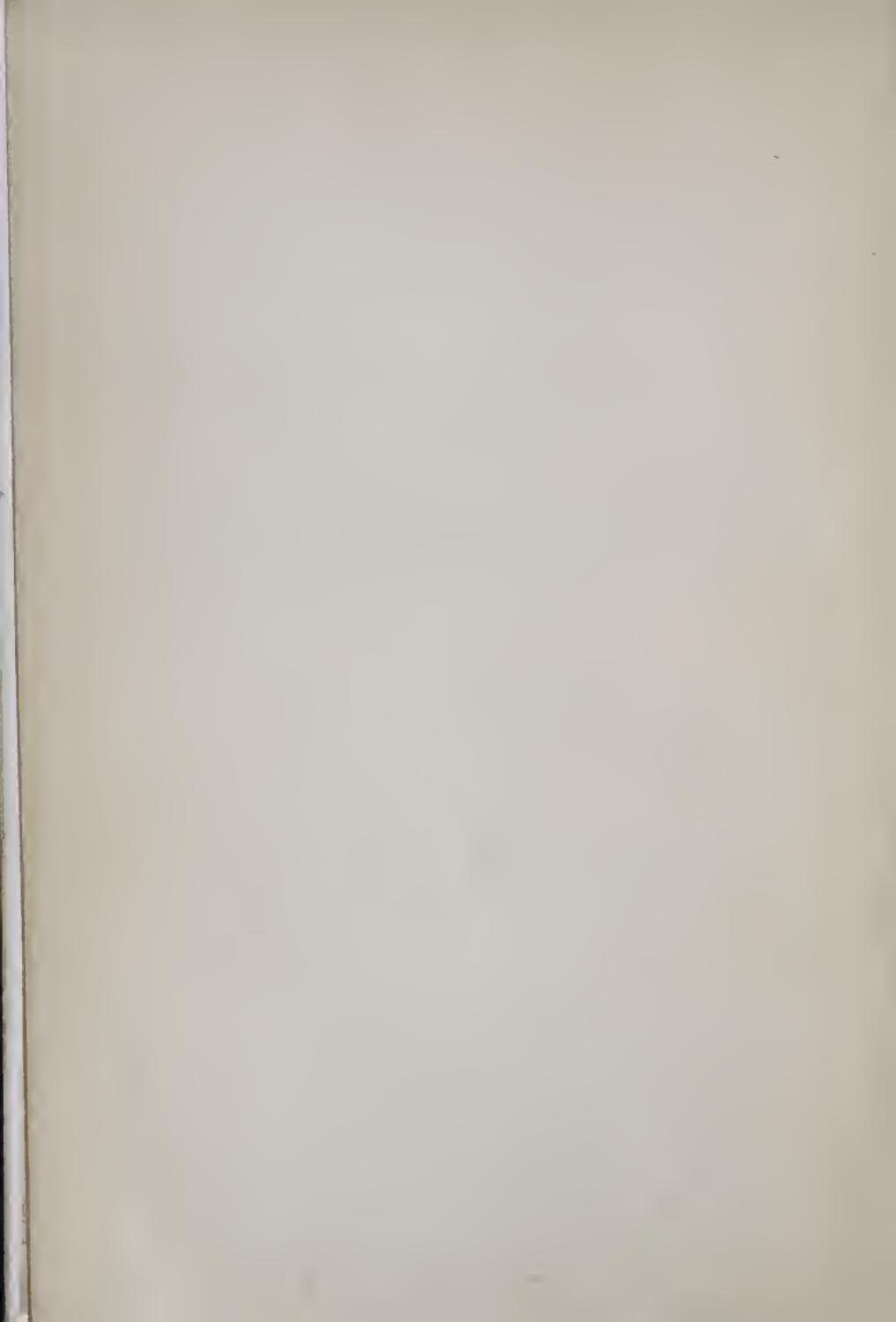
ELEANOR STREDDER.

“ I’ve a friend at my side,
To lift me and aid me, whatever betide ;
To trust to the world is to build on the sand :—
I’ll trust but in Heaven and my good Right Hand.”

MACKAY.

T. NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, and New York

1896



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JACK AND HIS OSTRICH.

I.

A HOME ON THE VELDT.

JACK TREBY loved to say that he was an English boy, although he had never seen the dear old mother country of which his father so often talked; for he was born among the wide South African plains, where through the parching summer the sun-rays burn like fire, where the dry leaves shrivel with the heat, and the flowers can only bloom in sheltered places. Yet he was the proudest and happiest of boys when his father stroked his curly head and called him a "true-born Briton."

For Jack was his father's all—his joy and treasure. In that wide, lonely plain they had but each other. Their nearest neighbour was a good twenty miles distant across country, and he was a Dutch Boer.

There was a Hottentot woman, with arms and face as yellow as a duck's bill, who lived in a hut

at the other side of the farm-yard. She cooked the dinner and washed the shirts for Jack and his father. She was always ready to do anything she could to make them comfortable, if she only knew how. Jack called her "Old Tottie," or "Granny Golden-face," when he was in a roguish mood ; for she had been very good and kind to him when he was left a little motherless boy.

Then there were the Kafir men, as black as ebony, with naked legs and arms, and just a dirty scarlet blanket twisted round their waists—handsome fellows, who came and worked for Jack's father every now and then ; working diligently and well until they had earned money enough to buy a rifle or a new blanket, when they would throw down the spade and flail and go back to their own people.

Jack's father was not a rich man. He had not much money when he came out to Africa, so he bought his farm where farms were the cheapest—right out in the wilds. It was life in the rough. No wonder he kept his little boy always at his side. It made a man of Jack, for he learned many things in his long talks with his father which a boy of ten in England would know nothing about. Jack learned more in this way than he did from books ; for his school-hour was the last hour at night, when his father's work was done, and when both of them were very often sleepy.

On one delightful summer evening, when the

brilliant African moon poured down its floods of silvery light, Jack sat nodding on the door-step with a coloured map of England spread upon his knees. He was trying to rub the sleep out of his winking eyes with one hand, whilst with the forefinger of the other he tried to trace the boundaries of the English counties.

“ York ; chief town, York,” he cried triumphantly.
“ But, father, what word is this ?”

Jack ran off with his map to where his father sat smoking on a rough bench, in what should have been their garden, only there was so much work to be done on the farm and so few to do it that the garden was left to Jack and nature. A hedge of prickly pear kept the oxen from trampling over it. Jack’s watering-pot encouraged one tall cactus to show its scarlet flowers, under the shadow of the broad eaves of the low thatched roof of the farm-house.

Jack’s father nodded, and then roused himself with a smile to answer his son’s inquiry. “ That, Jack ? Why, that’s Nottingham—the very town where your grandfather still lives.”

“ I’ll make a mark against it,” said Jack. Dashing back into their one sitting-room for the pen and ink, he made a good round blotch right over the name.

“ Well done,” laughed his father. “ So you think erasing it in your map will stamp it in your mind, my boy. Come, we are dead-beat to-night, and

must give it up. To-morrow we will have a good spell at the figures. So now to bed; the faster the better."

Jack gathered up his books and went indoors.

His little bedstead was an officer's camp-chair, which his father had picked up second-hand at the Cape. It stood just opposite the bedroom window, in the same room with his father's. Between them were the well-battered black travelling-chests his father had brought with him from England; and on the pegs over the head of his father's bed lay his rifle. Every night it was loaded and ready for use. Jack was often in the room alone with it; but then Jack could be trusted anywhere.

He said his prayers and tumbled into bed; but not to sleep, for his thoughts were busy with Nottingham and grandfather.

The house was only one story high, and the room had no ceiling. Jack could look between the rough wooden rafters right up into the thatch, and watch the bright eyes of the tarantula spiders as they crawled along the beams. He heard his father speaking to Tottie's husband, a white-haired Hottentot, who knew the ways of the country, and was by turns ploughman, shepherd, and house-servant.

"Sheep all right," he heard them say, and lifted up his curly head to look at the white walls of the sheepfold; for an African sheepfold has a stone wall all round it, and a good strong gate, which is safely

locked at night-fall. Jack knew very well that this flock was his father's chief wealth. There was not much ploughing and sowing with so few hands to depend upon. The sheep were everything.

By-and-by his father came in, gave his little son his customary good-night kiss, and stretched himself on the truckle-bed in the other corner, to enjoy the sweet sleep of the labouring man. Jack was careful not to wake him.

The glorious splendour of the South African moon made the room as light as day, while all without was flooded with a silvery radiance, so beautiful that our little Jack felt more wide-awake than ever. He was watching for the stars as they shone out one by one, so much larger and brighter than we in England have ever seen them.

Presently he saw something black on the wall of the sheepfold. He sat upright. It moved. He saw it fling out its long dark arms ; and then another and another patch of black seemed crawling up behind it.

Suddenly it flashed into Jack's head, " Whosoever climbeth up by the wall into the sheepfold, the same is a thief and a robber." Out of bed he jumped, shouting, " Father ! father !" At the same moment, Jack's grand pet, the tame ostrich Vickel, set up a loud noisy scream.

Vickel, as Jack's father had often said, was as good a guard as a mastiff. She had been given to

Jack when she was a three days' chicken, looking like a round ball of dirty yellow fluff, and he had fed her with his own hands every day; and now as she stretched out her long neck she seemed as tall as the porch. She was crying "Thief! thief!" in her bird fashion, as plainly as any English watch-dog would growl "Thief!" to his master.

Jack's father was out of bed in an instant, with his rifle in his hand, just as the last black figure dropped over the wall into the sheepfold. He fired his rifle into the air, hoping the sound of the report might scare away the thieves, and began to dress in all haste.

"Keep where you are, my boy," he said, "and on no account leave the house. Put the bar in the bedroom door as soon as I am gone. I'll shut Vickel in the outer room, and she'll keep everybody else from coming in. Be a brave boy, and just lie still until I return."

"I'll be as still as a mouse, father; but hadn't I better get into my jacket?" answered Jack.

"Yes, dress," returned his father; "only be still."

Mr. Treby reloaded his rifle and crept out. Presently Jack heard the brush of Vickel's wings as she made the tour of their sitting-room.

"Don't do mischief, Vickel," gasped Jack with a catch in his breath very suggestive of tears; but he choked them back with all his might.

He stood with his little hands clasped tightly to-

gether, watching through the window, yet not near enough to it to be seen from without.

He saw his father creep cautiously along, in the shadow of the farm-yard wall, towards the great open shed where the oxen were tethered, and saw him climb into the heavy broad-wheeled waggon, which was drawn under one end, to shelter it from the sun. Now that Mr. Treby was mounted in the waggon, where he could see and not be seen, Jack felt easier. He thought of his dying mother's words, "In every trouble, pray;" and kneeling down at the bedside, he whispered, "Save, Lord, or we perish," when the flash and report of his father's rifle seemed to shake the house. The oxen bellowed and tore the ground in their infuriated terror. Jack started to his feet and ran to the window.

"Maw wah!" groaned the old Hottentot, who was crouching under the eaves, and caught sight of Jack's pale face. "He'll take 'em as they come out," he whispered, making emphatic signs to the boy to go back.

Jack knew that he must not let himself be seen. He remembered his father's charge, and moved away. What happened next he could not tell. There was a shout of savage glee, a wild, unintelligible yell. Vickel screamed like mad. A sudden light without—a strange, oppressive heat—and then a dense smoke began to fill the room.

Jack dipped the towel in the water-jug and put it over his head, for bright red sparks began to fall

between the rafters. "Father! father!" he shrieked, forgetting his promise to be still in this unthought-of danger. The ostrich heard his piteous cry, and split the door between them with her powerful beak. Then Jack drew out the bar and let her in. She flew past him, and in her frantic efforts to escape dashed against the window, smashing glass and frame to atoms. Jack drove her with all speed through the flying splinters. She was almost out of the window, when the glare from the blazing roof so frightened her that she drew back with a scream. After wheeling round and round the room, Vickel tucked her head under her wing like a true ostrich, as if shutting her eyes to the danger she could no longer escape would save her.

Jack was so well used to Vickel's ways that he knew he could catch her now easily enough. He had seen his father throw a fishing-net over her and haul her off when she was doing mischief in the garden. He managed to pull the blanket off his bed and throw it over her; but his limbs were heavy, and he felt like one moving in a dream.

At last he heard his father calling, in an agony of desperation, "My boy! my boy! Heaven help me! where's my boy?"

"Here, father, here," Jack tried to answer, but his voice sounded feeble and strange even in his own ears. Things were falling all around him. Lights were flashing, and confused noises rang in his head. He

was going, going somewhere. Then the dreadful feeling of oppression lightened, and he knew that the strong arms which clasped him so tightly were his father's.

Something he murmured about getting a hood for Vickel, as his father lifted him through the broken window and gave him to the Hottentot.

Once in the open air, Jack began to revive. The Hottentot laid him under the garden hedge, and charging him not to cry, ran back to help his master.

Poor little Jack gazed at the blazing roof with a bewildered face, as his senses slowly returned to him. Suddenly it flashed upon his mind that his father was still in the burning house, and staggering to his feet he tottered round the garden. He was just in time to see Vickel, who was still enveloped in the blanket, hauled out of the bedroom window, as if she had been a sack of wheat. Like himself, she was stupified by the smoke, or it would not have been so easy to save her.

“Drag her away!” shouted his father, as one of the great black chests was hoisted into the opening.

The Hottentot tugged at the ends of the blanket. Down came the heavy chest with a thud, and Jack's father sprang on to the window-sill, with his face as black as a Kafir's and his shirt sleeves in a blaze. He threw himself on the ground and rolled over and over.

The Hottentot snatched the blanket from Vickel's

head and wrapped it round his master. Between them the flames were soon extinguished; for Mr. Treby seized some heavy sods, that were lying in a heap where he had been digging the day before, and crushed the burning shirt beneath them, plunging his arms into the midst of the heap.

What could poor Jack be thinking of when he saw his father burrowing in the ground, and the Hottentot twisting the blanket round and round his shoulders, as if he were about to choke him? for he ran away!

II.

UP IN THE MORNING.

YES, Jack left his father writhing on the ground and ran away. But it was to find Tottie. Ah, where was Tottie? Jack reached the hut, and it was empty.

Suddenly the two men looked up and missed him, and the shouts for the "The child! the child!" roused poor Tottie from her hiding-place. At the first alarm she had crept into the *sloot*—that is, the deep ditch which ran round the back of the farm; but the thought that Jack was missing conquered her terror, and she crawled out, plastered with mud from head to foot.

No one could have taken her for a woman; for she crept on her hands and knees, listening with her ear to the ground, as she heard the patter of the sheep, and felt sure that the thieves were driving them away. She was the first to catch sight of Jack coming out of her hut, and made signs to him to hide himself. He darted back into the corner of the hut,

crouching in the dark, and waited while the sheep went by.

He heard his father's voice shouting "Jack!" round the burning house, but he dared not answer. After a while, Tottie, still crawling on her hands and knees, peeped in at the door to see if he were safe. How she hugged him in her joy at their great deliverance, for she assured him that the thieves were gone; yet they dared not venture forth too soon. Tottie lay with her ear to the ground, almost afraid to breathe, listening to the roar of the flames and the falling of the rafters. A stealthy step was drawing near the hut; a gasping sigh was heard in the very doorway. Jack clung to Tottie now and shivered. A head was put in at the door. It was his father.

"Safe! all safe!" was echoed from lip to lip, as the four seated themselves on the ground, for the white-haired Hottentot was behind his master.

Then Tottie got up and found some food and water that were in the hut, and pressed them all to eat.

"The utmost we can do now," said Jack's father, "is to protect ourselves. The thieves must take what they will."

"They are gone," cried Tottie.

But the cautious old Hottentot dared not believe her; so they sat still and listened until the day began to break. Jack's head was resting on his father's shoulder, but no one slept.

The flames were over but a dull, red glow still lit

up the gray of the western sky when Mr. Treby ventured forth to reconnoitre.

The sheepfold and the shed were still standing, but not one lamb was left. His house lay in ruins. Every leaf in his garden which the sun had spared was burned and blackened with the fire.

But the agony of the night, when for one brief hour his scarcely-rescued Jack was missing, made him think far less of the actual loss than he would otherwise have done.

He fed the oxen, which were still lowing in their stalls, and dressed his blistered arms with a handful of their meal, thankful to find the little hut he used as a store still standing.

He had gone the round of the farm, and was slowly returning, when something moving on the other side of the sloot attracted his attention. Keeping a keen lookout, he crossed the ditch with his rifle on his shoulder, when he saw Vickel stretching out her long legs and gaping. His own shirt was dropping into tinder, and her beautiful gray wings were singed and shrivelled.

At the sound of her master's voice, the frightened bird ran after him, and tucking her head under his arm, expressed her consternation by sundry hoarse screams as he took her back with him to the Hottentot's hut.

Up sprang Jack, almost as overjoyed to find Vickel safe as his father had been to find him uninjured on Tottie's lap.

“Never so bad but it might be worse,” said Jack’s father, stroking the curly head more fondly than ever. “Jump on Vickel’s back and ride after me, for I cannot bear you out of my sight. You could not know what you were doing to run away from me as you did in the night. You might have been killed.”

“I was looking for Tottie,” said Jack repentantly. He was afraid that he had made his father angry; for Mr. Treby turned his head away, but it was to brush the tears from his eyes, as he murmured,—

“God bless you, my brave, true-hearted boy!” Then he added with a laugh, “We must all to work. The first thing is to ask our neighbours to help us to get back the sheep. I shall send the Hottentot to Scarsdorp. Tottie must watch the ruins. She is better able to take care of herself than you think, for you can’t beat her at hide-and-seek. Then you and I, Jack, must take the ox-waggon, and try the temper of our neighbour the Boer. We English do not reckon them the best of friends, for they do not want us here. But I found a stray cow of his last year, so he owes me a good turn.”

Jack felt like a man as he followed his father from place to place, sometimes riding on Vickel’s back, sometimes jumping down when he thought he could help in his father’s preparations. He filled a sack with mealies, as they call the Indian corn, ready to feed the oxen by the way.

Soon after the sun had risen, whilst the morning

air blew cool and fresh, Jack was seated by his father's side in the front of the big, lumbering ox-waggon. Everything which Mr. Treby had been able to save from the fire was packed inside, for he was afraid to leave them in an open shed, with no better guard than Tottie.

The fowls had all been scared away by the sight of the flames, and were wandering at will amongst the low bushes which dotted the plain they were crossing.

The sky above their heads was one unclouded blue, and in the red sand which covered the plain the dusty ants were fighting.

It was no easy matter to find the right path in such a wilderness of sand and bush, where there were no hills or trees to serve as land-marks. Jack's father had to look carefully on the ground for the ruts which had been made by the wheels of the post-cart.

Jack knew that post-cart well with its six gray horses. It was their one link with the outward world. How often he had stood beside his father listening for the loud blast of the bugle which heralded its coming! For the arrival of the English mail is a day of joy to the colonist.

Presently Jack's father looked up and pointed with his whip to a heavy cloud of dust.

"It is the mail!" he exclaimed. "For once I am fortunate."

"No, father," persisted Jack, who was looking the other way; "I am positive it is Vickel."

Nearer and nearer came the storm of dust thrown up by the galloping horses, but Jack's eye was fastened on a light gray figure skimming above that billowy sea of reddening sand.

Mr. Treby drew his waggon out of the path and halted. As the Pretoria mail-cart came in sight, with its usual freight of passengers filling the seats and even clinging to the sides, Mr. Treby waved his hand-kerchief, and the six powerful grays drew up, stamping and snorting.

"Any letters for me?" he asked anxiously.

"Any mischief doing in this neighbourhood?" was the answering inquiry, as Mr. Wilton, the postman, opened his bag and sorted over its contents for an English newspaper.

"We noticed an uncommon glow in the sky at our last halting-place," put in one of the passengers.

"A little past midnight," added another.

"We have kept a sharp lookout as we came along," continued the postman. "We were all of one opinion —there was a fire somewhere out on the veldt," for so the great African plains are usually called.

"A fire!" repeated Mr. Treby bitterly. "Look yonder, where the smoke-wreath rises above a smouldering ash-heap, where last night, gentlemen, you would have seen a happy home—my home," he repeated in tones that wakened the sympathy of his auditors.

For in those far-off wilds Englishmen meet as brothers. Each is ready to help the other ; for who can tell that, in the next turn of fortune's wheel, their own need may not be as pressing.

Grave and anxious faces were turned to Mr. Treby, and many a deep-voiced exclamation of anger and pity interrupted his account of the night-attack upon his farm.

"It is the beginning of a general rising among the Kafirs," said one.

"A very ominous occurrence," observed another, shaking his head.

"I'll do as you desire," promised Wilton. "I'll gallop on to Pretoria as hard as my horses can go, and lodge the information with the captain of the mounted police. Had not you better come too ?"

"No," returned Jack's father ; "the journey would be too long for me. I was a poor man yesterday ; to-day I'm but ten steps from beggarhood. I am on my way to warn my neighbour, Van Immerseel. He counts his sheep by the thousand, and the next attack may be upon them. It was the sheep the villains wanted ; and I had no help on the farm but one old Hottentot and his wife, so that I was single-handed against five. They thought to stop my rifle by flinging the firebrand on the thatch ; and indeed they gave me enough to do to rescue my little boy from the flames."

"Cheer up, old fellow," said one, "and tell us what we can do for you."

“A round of shot and a coat, if it is not asking too much,” ventured Jack’s father. “I shall be able to dig out something from the ruins as the ashes cool; but my bullets will be melted into one lump by this time and my money into another.”

There was despair in the laugh with which this was said, but it was the despair of a brave man who, when he feels the wreck of hope, still works on.

More than one shot-case was opened and the contents divided, before Mr. Treby had finished speaking.

“What will you take for the fore ox with the crumpled horn?” asked a dark-haired man, who was holding on by the side of the post-cart.

“Market price,” answered Jack’s father eagerly.

Of course there was a show of disputing over the worth of the stalwart beast, after the usual fashion of buyers and sellers; but it did not last long. Mr. Treby unyoked the leader from his team and tied him by a long rope to the back of the post-cart.

While the stranger was counting out the ten pounds in English money, which he finally agreed to give for the ox, Vickel overtook the waggon. She flew wheeling round and round for a while, drawing nearer with every circle, until Jack, who had been listening most eagerly to the conversation, perceived her manœuvres. So, whilst his father was busy with the ox, he crept to the back of the waggon, and parting the heavy tilt, took her in.

Vickel sprang up eagerly enough at the sight of her

Jack's face ; but when she felt the waggon move she was frightened.

Jack's arm was round her neck in a moment, as if he thought he could hold her against her will.

"I'll keep you somehow, Vic," he whispered. "You have grown such a big chick I can't hold you. Come, you must go ; bye-bye."

Pushing his fingers through a little hole in the sack of mealies, he got a few in his hand, and whilst she was picking them up, he slipped off one of his stockings. He poured another handful of the mealies into it and held it before Vic. Down went the long beak, snapping at the corn, which slipped lower and lower in the stocking. This was just what Jack wanted.

"You good old darling !" he exclaimed, pulling it right over her head and half-way down her long neck, until it fitted. The big bird became as passive as a dove. She folded her long legs under her and sat down on the sack of mealies. Much elated with his success, Jack climbed on to her back and held the stocking fast with both hands.

"Well done, my little man," said a diamond-digger who had been watching him from the back of the post-cart. "You've learned the trick of the ostrich-catchers, I can see."

"She is mine," answered Jack proudly. "She has followed me right across the veldt like a dog."

"And what shall I give you for her ?" asked the stranger, shaking some gold in his hand.

"I sell Vickel!" exclaimed Jack in anger and disgust; "no, never."

Mr. Treby hesitated for a moment. "In such a strait as ours, Jack—" he began.

Jack looked up into his father's face, and burst into a flood of tears.

"No, I can't do it, gentlemen; it would break his heart. I can't part them. She has been his only playfellow, you see. Thanks, many, all the same," added Mr. Treby, turning to the kindly passengers.

There was a broad grin on the diamond-digger's face; but the postman laughed good-naturedly. "How about the coat?" he asked.

"I can pay for it now," put in Jack's father, "if any one of you could accommodate me."

But not for love or money could a coat be obtained, simply because not one of those travel-stained, way-worn travellers had a second with him.

"Passengers by the Government mail from Natal to Pretoria have for the most part to leave their luggage behind them for the transport-rider's waggon," explained the postman. "Is there anything I can bring you from Pretoria as I return?"

Jack's father considered a moment or two, counted the money in his hand, and then dictated a short list of necessaries, which the postman wrote down in his pocket-book. As he gathered up his reins, he tossed a broken biscuit to the sobbing child, and with a chorus of farewell wishes from the passengers, set off

his horses at a rattling pace. The lumbering waggon was soon distanced.

Mr. Treby saw the passengers lean forward in anxious discussion ; and many a backward glance was cast upon the burnt rags, which were dropping from him at every step. But he knew that his wants would not be forgotten ; and more than that, his warning would be faithfully given to every farm-house on their route.

He was lost in his own thoughts, whilst Jack munched his biscuit in silence, watching his father's troubled countenance.

A groan burst from Mr. Treby's lips as the post-cart was lost to sight, and not a sight or sound of human being disturbed the stillness of that vast treeless plain. Then two small fearless arms were clasped about his neck, and little loving kisses covered his bearded face as Jack whispered, "Did you really mind me keeping Vickel ?"

III.

AFRICAN NEIGHBOURS.

FOR an hour or two during the burning heat in the middle of the day Mr. Treby was obliged to rest. Here and there the veldt was crossed by little streams. By the edge of one of these the waggon halted. In places it was nearly dry, yet the milk-bushes, with their long waxen leaves, grew taller by its margin.

Jack and his ostrich were glad to alight and stretch themselves, for Vickel could not stand upright beneath the tilt without knocking her head. A good play amidst the waving tufts of tambouki grass refreshed them both.

When Mr. Treby had fed his oxen, he sat down under the shadow of the nearest bush, and called Jack to share the dinner which Tottie had provided for them. The ostrich found her own amongst the loose stones and sprouting leaves by the brook.

When they were ready to start again on their journey, Jack's father gathered a nice bundle of the long, dry grass to make a bed for his little boy in a

corner of the waggon. Jack coiled himself up in it like a bird in its nest, and found it very comfortable, whilst his father calculated how far the ten pounds could go. He had neither pencil nor paper, so he made his figures with the point of his penknife on the side of the waggon. It was fortunate, he thought, that the knife was in the pocket of his trousers. As he felt for it he pulled out the newspaper the postman had given to him. It was the last number of the *Illustrated London News*. What a burlesque, it seemed to him, to receive it in such circumstances!

“Here, Jack,” he said, “here is something for you to look at. Take care of it, my boy, for I was just thinking you might forget how to read before we had another book to call our own. We shall want so much to build the house again.”

“I shall never forget how to read, father,” answered Jack decidedly; “and I can write with a burned stick on the wall of Tottie’s hut, or make figures, as you are doing now, for I have got my knife as well as you.” He dived into the pocket of his jacket as he spoke, and produced a stout clasp-knife, which had seen a deal of service in the garden.

“All right,” returned his father. “We must gather up the fragments. Every trifle may be of use.”

Then Mr. Treby went on with his calculations, and Jack lay back in his nook, with the big rush-hat Tottie had found for him tilting over his eyes. How he enjoyed his lovely pictures; whilst Vickel, who

had become more reconciled to the jolting waggon, diverted herself by enlarging the hole in the sack of mealies.

When Mr. Treby looked round again Jack was fast asleep, with the precious paper still in his hand. The poor child was worn out with the alarm and excitement of the previous night, so his father was careful not to disturb him; for he said to himself with a sigh, "No one can tell what may lie before us."

Jack did not rouse until the glorious African sunset had tinged the lonely veldt with molten gold. Hard-winged, spotted insects buzzed in and out of the waggon. One blood-thirsty mosquito refused all notice to quit until Vickel snapped at it most ferociously.

But they were near their journey's end. The zinc roofs of the Boer's farm-buildings glowed like fires in the distance. Behind them was the wide flat plain, one dull, monotonous red; before them rose the rocky hills, the boundary of Jack's horizon. He had seen them looming cloud-like in the distance as long as he could remember anything; but now, as the waggon rumbled on, and they came nearer and nearer, as the daylight faded, they seemed to alter into some big blur of brown, blotting out the ruddy sunset gold. The clumps of bush grew larger, and now and then a shy antelope darted across their path. Jack sat up, resting one hand on his father's knee. The weary oxen dragged heavily along.

"Jack," said his father, "just one more mile. We are close on Jaarsveldt. Cheer up, my boy."

Then Jaek began to sing, but his father stopped him. "Hush, there is somebody coming."

A wild cat scampered over a ridge of stones and made the oxen bellow. She had been startled from her lair by the approaching horseman.

"There they come," continued Mr. Treby, as a powerful black horse with an equally ponderous rider emerged from the shadows; two Kafir attendants followed, dragging between them a bœuf antelope. Some smaller game was hanging to their master's saddle. "I ought to know that young giant," soliloquized Mr. Treby. "He must be a son of Van Immerseel." It was evident that the hunting party was returning to the farm.

As they drew near to each other the young Boer stared hard at the ox-waggon and its ragged driver. But despite his forlorn appearance, Mr. Treby raised his hat with the air of an English gentleman, and pointing to the homestead before them, asked him if it were the residence of Van Immerseel.

The gigantic youngster stared and scratched his head, answering with a sullen "Jah" (Yes).

Mr. Treby's knowledge of Dutch was small, and young Immerseel knew nothing of English, but he comprehended that it was his father Mr. Treby wanted, and invited him by gestures to join company. He walked his horse by the side of the waggon, and

laughed most heartily when Vickel poked her long neck through the tilt, which she had been strenuously endeavouring to slit for the last hour. But his exclamations were in Dutch, and Mr. Treby failed to catch their import.

When they passed the outlying ostrich camp belonging to his father's farm, he pointed it out, and Mr. Treby expressed his admiration for the large flock of majestic birds it contained, by nods and smiles. But the proximity of so many of her feathered kin disturbed poor Vickel sorely, and taxed Jack's ingenuity to the utmost to keep her in bounds. Young Immerseel soon sent his black followers to the right about, the antelope was left under the wall of the camp, and one of the Kafirs ran forward to apprise the family at Jaarsveldt of the approach of the waggon.

The house was large, low, and square, of substantial red brick. On one side was the orchard, on the other extensive sheep-kraals; for where Mr. Treby had counted his sheep by the score, Van Immerseel counted his by ~~the~~ thousand. The water in the dam shone like silver beside the dark row of Kafir huts where his servants lived. The house was surrounded by a low wall, which enclosed the garden and farm-yard. At the open gate stood the strong-built, broad-shouldered owner. His habitual hospitality was tempered by his surly dislike of the English.

“Walt,” he shouted to his eldest son, in a voice so

gruff and deep that Jack thought it might have belonged to the strongest of their oxen.

"We must not be dismayed at that, Jack. These *Ooms* and *Tantes* are a worthy race, if you can but get on their right side," observed Mr. Treby.

"Ooms and tantes?" repeated Jack inquiringly.

"Yes; uncles and aunts, as we should say," laughed his father. "The Boers and their wives are uncles and aunts to all the rest of the world. Pray, don't forget that. Now take the reins."

Mr. Treby sprang lightly to the ground, and walked up to his burly neighbour with outstretched hand, offering the customary salutation of the Dutch, "Dagh, oom" (Good-day, uncle). Slowly and sullenly the hand was taken, but the unwilling pressure tightened to a hearty grip as the Englishman hastened to explain his object. This was not an easy matter, but he pointed to his burned clothes, about which the smell of fire still lingered, and then across the silent veldt to where a dull black column of smoke rose up ominously in the far distance.

"Burned out!" The Boer comprehended thus far in a moment. The shepherds at Jaarsveldt had also seen the ruddy glow in the midnight sky. The sullen frown began to change its character. The wrinkled brow was puckered still, but with most genuine concern. He slapped Mr. Treby on the back, and forced him to enter; whilst his son gave his horse to one of the Kafirs, and lifted Jack out of the

waggon as if he had been a baby, mounted him on his shoulder, and marched off, laughing, to the house.

From such an unwonted elevation, Jack had an excellent view of the house they were approaching over his father's head. But this hardly consoled him for the loss of dignity.

A wooden staircase outside the house led to the upper story, which was little better than a loft, and was used as the general store for every variety of household goods and discarded lumber. The door of the house was cut in two, like an English stable door, and over the lower half, which was closed, Tante Milligen was hanging, anxious to see what sort of people her husband was bringing. Around her stood her black and yellow maids, excited and eager, for the arrival of the strangers was a pleasant break in the dull monotony of their daily life. At a word from the "oom," a woolly-haired black (with nothing but a dirty scarlet blanket twisted round her waist) was sent running with a message, but to whom or where Mr. Treby had no idea.

Tante Milligen threw open the door, and dispersing the little knot of servants and children, invited the travellers to enter.

Jack looked round the large white-washed room with some surprise. The heavy chairs and lumbering settee were covered with home-tanned skins; but the curiously-spotted floor attracted the most of his attention. It was made of clay, thickly dotted over

with plum-stones, well polished by the friction of many feet.

An ample supper was awaiting the return of the young hunter—huge joints of beef, from which the rations for the numerous dependants had been already cut; piles of roaster-cake; and above all, a well-filled basket of grapes, oranges, and peaches.

At first poor Jack was almost dazed by the sudden change from the shadowy night to the bright lamp-light within the Boer's *sit-kamé* (sit-chamber, or sitting-room, as we should say in English). More bewildering still was the buzz of strange voices around him, every one speaking in a language he could not understand. Walt placed him on the wondrous floor, in the middle of the room, and called to his younger brother, a boy about Jack's age, but twice his size, "Zyl, Zyl."

Jack caught the name, and smiled, as a lumpy, sheepish-looking boy answered the brotherly appeal, by seizing him by both hands and dragging him to the table, around which the family were gathering. Their sister, a fat, freckled girl of thirteen, sat staring at him, with her thumb in her mouth, until poor Jack grew very hot and uncomfortable, for he was as black as a swep and as shy as a wild rabbit. He wanted to keep close to his father, who was doing his best to cover up the awkwardness of his introduction, and make the most of the few Dutch phrases he could command. In vain Jack tried to edge a little nearer

to him. Between Walt and Zyl there was no escape. Tante Milligen loaded his plate with the tough beef, which at that hour of night he knew not how to eat. His eyes were fixed upon the corners of the room, in one of which lay a little bundle of blue and white check, and in the other the head and horns of the bullock whose ribs they were eating. Presently the bundle rolled over, and Jack discovered by its snoring that it really was a sleeping child.

Just then the black maid returned, followed by a young man in a pepper-and-salt suit, with an English hat. Jack's father brightened, for he saw by the cast of the stranger's countenance he was a German, and guessed that the Boer, who was probably his master, had summoned him to act as interpreter.

This new comer was quickly seated at the family supper-table, between Van Immerseel and Mr. Treby. Yes, it was fortunate this young Otto, the German shepherd, knew about as much of English as Mr. Treby did of Dutch. With his assistance a sort of patch-work conversation was carried on.

“Vat ou zay?” the Boer inquired continually, for he was slow of understanding.

The one fact “burned out” had been made plain to him. To this he now added, “set on fire.” When at last he was made to comprehend, “sheep gone,” he laid down his knife and fork in sympathetic consternation. After a while they began to understand each other better. Walt, who seemed far more intelligent

than his father, became an interested listener, and quickly grasped the position in which the unfortunate English farmer now stood. He scratched his head, as if recalling some occurrence to his memory; and then rubbing his hands gleefully, thundered in Mr. Treby's ear, as if he thought the loudness of his voice would make his meaning plainer.

He had been hunting "velderbeeste" all day. Jah, he was sure he had crossed fresh sheep-tracks, leading to the rocks among which the free Kafirs had their homes.

"Follow them," counselled his father, and Walt's eyes brightened at the prospect of a fight.

Then it was Mr. Treby's turn to explain. He managed to make them understand that he was alone, having sent his only man to Scarsdorp to warn his neighbour there.

Whilst this conversational medley was taking place, Tante Milligen perceived poor Jack's vain endeavour to get through his supper, and kindly exchanged the gigantic slice of beef for roaster-eakes and honey. Zyl and his sister Genderen watched these disappear, and before the last mouthful was finished, piled his plate with grapes and peaches. After his long and dusty drive, the fruit seemed delicious; but in spite of his utmost endeavours, Jack was nodding over his supper. With a good-humoured smile, Tante Milligen made a sign. Walt took him up once more, and laid him on the sheep-skin by the snoring bundle.

It was intolerable to be treated like a baby, just because they were all so big and he so little. Jack started up belligerently, but his father's eye checked him; so he contented himself with shrugging his shoulders against the white-washed wall, and staring at his *vis-à-vis*—the bull's head—for he was far too indignant to bestow a single glance upon his sleeping companion.

“I should just like to show them the sort of stuff an English boy is made of,” he thought.

IV.

JAARSVELDT BY DAYLIGHT.

“OUT-SPAN by our gate,” said Van Immerseel to Mr. Treby. “In the morning we may find out which way the sheep were driven. What could you do single-handed in the open, suppose those fellows should return? I am off with Otto and the lads to my own sheep-kraals. When once such work begins who knows where it may stop? Those black neighbours of ours won’t catch me napping; but you are beaten out of time already. Turn in till daylight.”

Otto duly translated, adding to his master’s advice the comforting remark that the black beggars could not drive away the veldt.

So Jack’s father decided to live in his waggon for a day or two until he knew what course to take. The Boer’s view of last night’s proceedings was so similar to the postman’s, that he felt it would be unwise to risk returning to his burning farm at present. Until the ashes cooled nothing could be done. He only wished Tottie was with them; but Tottie, who had seen the marauders pass while she lay hidden in

the sloot, did not believe they were Kafirs at all, but a pack of half-caste thieves, who would make away with their booty as fast as they could, and never think of returning. When they were gone, she saw no reason why she should leave her hut.

Meanwhile some of the Boer's men had unyoked Mr. Treby's oxen and secured them for the night. His pleasant way of speaking was so different from the rough manners of the Boers, they helped him gladly. Whilst they were thus engaged "out-spanning," as they say in Africa, Walt Immerseel cut off the horns from the bull's head, and putting one in his own pocket, offered the other to Mr. Treby. "With these we can make each other hear if anything occurs in the night," he said, and Otto repeated. When the danger-signal was agreed upon, Walt marched off to play patrol on the other side of the sheep-kraals. Jack was already in his grassy nest, and now his father lay down beside him.

"There is no word of comfort for us to-night, Jack," he said despondently. "Our Bible was on the shelf, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered his boy; "so it is burnt. Everything must be burnt by this time—everything that was in the house, I mean, father."

"Yes, I am afraid so," was the gloomy answer. "We must fall back on memory. Tell me some verse or other, my dear, before we go to sleep."

Jack thought for a little while, and then he began to repeat softly,—

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

"That's right," murmured his father. "Troubled and afraid! It is just what I am to-night; but it won't do. I can't see our way out of this; but the Lord will provide. Draw a little closer, Jack; let me have tight hold of you whilst we go to sleep."

The sleep they so sorely needed came at last; but it was broken before daybreak by the heavy tramp of the Boer and his son returning to the house, for with approaching daylight the fear of an attack from the thieves diminished.

"All right," shouted Walt Immerseel, very proud of the new English phrase he had beguiled the tedious night-watch by learning from Otto.

Mr. Treby waved his hat in reply; then the Boer stopped, and beckoning to Otto, who was following, came up to the waggon. He seated himself on the shaft, and entered into a long conversation; but as Jack was only half-awake, he could not understand what they were saying.

Walt had gone into the house, but he soon came back with a huge cup of steaming coffee and a plate of cold beef left from the last night's supper. Evidently the hospitable Boers did not mean to let the poor Englishman starve.

"Now, Jack," said his father as soon as they were alone, "I am going away with young Walt and his men to follow the sheep-tracks they saw yesterday, so

I must leave you here. You will be quite safe, as all the farm people are astir, and they seem very kindly disposed. You must be a man, and take care of the few things we have saved. Tante Milligen has offered to look after you. Don't take offence at their queer ways. You were so tired last night you were almost cross. I have told them you would rather stay in the waggon, and we may not be gone long."

Jack felt a strange rising in his throat at the thought of being left behind, but he set his teeth hard. One thing he was quite sure about—he was not going to add to his father's trouble in any way; so he gulped back the rising tears, and answered bravely, "Never mind me, father; I shall get on somehow." He drank a little coffee from his father's cup, and then lay down again in the dry grass. Mr. Treby covered him with the tattered remains of the blanket which had hooded Vickel, and then went to fetch a pail of water from the farm-pond. When he returned, Jack was fast asleep again. His father took good care not to waken him. "The longer he sleeps the better," he said to himself. "It will do him good, and he will not miss me so much."

But Jack was sorely vexed when he roused at last to find his father fairly gone. With a stretch and a shake Jack got up, and gave Vickel her breakfast from the mealie sack; then he made himself a seat on the corner of the chest, much wondering what he should do for his own.

It was a glorious morning. He could hear the bleating of the calves in the farm-yard and the far-off tinkle from the sheepfold; but the big brown hills, with their rocky steeps, attracted the most of his attention, until he heard the shrill voices of the Kafir servants as they went about their daily work. Then Jack shrank back shyly, and contented himself with stroking Vickel's wings. It was grievous to see how her beautiful feathers were burnt and singed. Jack tried to make her look a little better by brushing off the browned tips, when the tilt was suddenly parted at the back of the waggon and a smiling baby-face peeped in; for when the Boer's children met at their early breakfast, they could talk of nothing but the little English boy. Zyl had already ascertained that he was still asleep in the waggon, and Genderen was looking forward to carrying him some breakfast. The presence of the little stranger seemed to them a very pleasant adventure. Jack's companion on the sheep-skin, baby Sannie, felt really aggrieved to think she was the only one in the household who had not seen him. But their mother charged them on no account to waken the poor child. Still Zyl thought there could be no harm in letting his little sister have just one peep at their sleepy visitor. So when they ran out to play, he mounted her on his shoulder. Away they went through the gate, and climbing up the back of the waggon, startled Jack, who had never seen so young a child before. He paused in his

grooming, lost in admiring surprise. It was a dear little face, in spite of its broad Dutch features, so sunburned and freckled ; and the big blue eyes that stared at Jack looked so innocent under the mass of flaxen curls, which completely covered the low forehead, that he involuntarily exclaimed, " You little dear."

But Vickel was far from sharing her master's feelings. Her head was still full of thieves ; and making a dart forward, she struck angrily at the infantine intruder. Zyl dragged his sister backwards, but Vickel had caught the blue checked pinafore in her beak.

Jack was frightened. He sprang upon Vickel's back, and seizing her head with both his hands, tried to make her let it go. Zyl tugged with all his might ; but Vickel was stronger than either of them. Zyl growled out something Jack could not understand. Little Sannie screamed vociferously. Before the boys could extricate the pinafore it was torn to ribbons. Jack dared not release his bird, for fear she should fly on to Zyl, who had struck at her more than once with his clenched fists. Sannie was more frightened than hurt. Zyl had tumbled her down on the ground whilst he tried to fasten the back of the tilt, for fear Vickel should swoop down upon them, in spite of Jack's endeavours to restrain her.

" Is your sister hurt ? " asked Jack repeatedly, but Zyl only answered with angry snorts. He grasped Sannie's hand and ran off with her, banging the gate

after them, whilst Jack alternately scolded and soothed his refractory pet.

"O Vickel," he groaned, "what have you done? That boy will tell his mother what a dreadful bird you've been; and then I don't know what will happen to us, and father is not here."

Jack laid his head on the ostrich's neck, and fairly sobbed in his dread of the consequences. The sound of a scolding voice in the farm-yard made him look up. As he was still perched on Vickel's back, he had a good view of the farm-house and its surroundings, through the slit which Vickel had made in the tilt on the previous day.

Sannie's screams had brought one of the Kafir maids to see what was the matter. She snatched the torn pinafore off the unfortunate little toddler, and held it up before Tante Milligen, whose head appeared above the half-door of the house at the same moment. The Dutch mother left her kneading trough, and tucking up the corner of her wide white apron, rushed out upon her youngest born, scolding and threatening at the top of her voice. Behind her crept Genderen, in her long blue and white checked pinafore reaching to the toes of her home-made sheep-skin shoes. The brown sun-kappje she was tying on very much resembled the head-gear of a Sister of Mercy. Jack would have laughed at the grotesque figures before him if he had not been so full of consternation, a feeling which Genderen's pale face seemed to reciprocate.

"Footsack, Zyl," she cried, and now Jack laughed in spite of his anxieties as the meaning of the queer Dutch word was made plain to him; for in accordance with his sister's advice, Zyl made a dart at the side gate into the farm-yard, but the Kafir maid frustrated his intention by setting her back against it.

The vocabulary of the scold in Dutch is by no means a limited one, and Tante Milligen seemed as if she would exhaust it all in her indignation at the state of Sannie's pinafore.

Poor Sannie's words were rendered unintelligible by her sobs; and Zyl was caught beyond all hope of escape. He stood before his angry mother, stolid and sullen as a young buffalo, and never opened his lips, whilst she knocked their heads together until Genderen began to cry in sympathy. But not one word of excuse or complaint would the Dutch boy utter.

How Jack's heart warmed to him, for he could so easily have told of Vickel and screened himself; but to see the baby struck was more than Jack could endure. He sprang off Vickel's back, and scooping two great handfuls of mealies out of the hole in the sack, he left her eating them, and rushed to the gate; but Zyl, in his fear that the ostrich might follow him, had fastened it inside. Jack knocked and shouted, "Mrs. Immerseel, Mrs. Immerseel, don't beat that poor little baby. Oh, pray don't. She could not help it. Let me in, and I'll tell you how it happened."

The Kafir maid opened the gate in answer to his

summons ; but, oh, it was dreadful to find no one could understand a single word he said. He marched up to Tante Milligen, and lifted his pent-house of a hat, as he had seen his father lift his, and held out his hand. But, alas ! it looked so dirty he drew it back again in disgust.

Although Jack's attempted explanations were all in vain, his sudden appearance created a diversion. Tante Milligen, supposing he had come to beg for a breakfast, smiled at him good-naturedly, and pointed to the kitchen-door. Jack shook his head, and tried to get between her and little Sannie.

" What can the child want ? " thought the Dutch-woman. " Something wrong with his father's beasts perhaps." So she sent her Kafir maid to see.

Off bounded Jack as soon as he perceived her destination, for he knew if he did not get to the waggon before her, Vickel would be sure to fly at her. He was white as ashes with fear as he scrambled on to the low, broad wheel, and stood with one eye on the ostrich and the other on the Kafir.

Jack half hoped, as they were both African born, they might take to each other. He was right so far : the Kafir was too wise to interfere with his bird, and Vickel, who was still quietly feeding, took no notice of her. The maid looked all round, saw that the oxen were quietly grazing, and feeling convinced there was nothing amiss, turned to Jack. He did not like the queer black creature, with her bare arms and

legs, to stare at him so. She was not like his yellow-faced Tottie, who always wore a woman's gown, and on Sundays a clean white cap as well ; and from this semi-savage, in her scarlet blanket, he shrank. Why wouldn't she go away ?

It was very horrid to be stared at, so Jack got into the waggon to escape from those glittering, bead-like eyes, and away went the Kafir singing.

Her song called forth a burst of laughter from a Hottentot herdsman, who was coming to lead the oxen to water. Happily for Jack he could speak a little English.

"No like de Black Antelope," he said with a grin ; "much she likee you. Listen how she go, making songs of 'Dis pretty Ingleese lamb, left alone on de wide, wide veldt.' "

Then Jack laughed in his turn, and was rather glad to hear that she had gone to fetch him some breakfast.

But he could not forget little Sannie. Standing up tip-toe on the top of the chest, he once more reconnoitred the entrance to Jaarsveldt through the slit in the tilt. Zyl had disappeared, but Genderen was trying to comfort her little sister. She took her in her arms and carried her round the farm-yard, holding her up to watch the little pigs tumbling one over another in their play. But it was of no use ; the pitiful sobs continued. Then Genderen brought her outside the gate to try the diversion of a little walk,

pointing out the Englishman's waggon, and trying to teach her to call "Jock! Jock Trairbee!"

Of course, poor Sannie only screamed the louder, and struggling from her sister's arms, ran away. Genderen's freckled face was pink with fatigue. Jack ran to her help with his *Illustrated News*. But Sannie would not look at him; so he took out the loose picture that was folded in it and spread it before them on the grass, with a nod to Genderen, and ran off.

It was happiness to Jack to watch the delight of the sisters from his peep-hole, as they cuddled together with the picture on their knees. There they sat, sucking the thumb of one hand, and tracing with the other the different figures in the picture.

When the Black Antelope returned with a bowl of milk and a hot roaster-cake, Jack felt unable to enjoy his breakfast and do full justice to Tante Milligen's hospitality. His head was aching and his hands were hot, so he sank down in his grassy nest to read his *Illustrated News*, and was nearly falling asleep when a great stone was aimed at Vickel's head. Jack was up in a moment, ready to defend his pet, for he caught sight of Zyl picking up a second stone under the garden wall.

With a great shout of defiance the two boys rushed at each other, and in spite of all Jack's father had said, a fight between English and Dutch was imminent. But Genderen's brown sun-kappje suddenly appeared

on the scene, with the Hottentot cow-keeper behind it. The sister was evidently warning and her follower threatening the unmanageable youngster with "ein lecker slaat" when the "oom" came back, if he persisted in annoying the English boy. Zyl bent his head as if he were a young goat about to butt, but never uttered a word even to his sister.

He might throw stones at Vickel by way of revenge for her attack; but, for all that, he was not going to tell tales. Jack grew hot and cold by turns, for he thought there would be no mercy for his bird if it were known that she was the true culprit who had torn the pinafore, and his gratitude to Zyl for so doggedly holding his tongue got the better of his anger. The arm he had raised to strike the stone from the Dutch boy's hand went lovingly round his neck instead. Jack drew himself up beside him with a look at Genderen which said, "We two understand each other; just let us alone, please."

Zyl gave him the queerest of glances from the corner of his eye. It was becoming evident to his slow intellect that Jack, having shared in the scrape, was ready to take his share in the punishment also. He rather liked that, and the grip which he gave Jack's other hand was as hearty as it was crushing.

V.

MAKING FRIENDS.

ENDEREN alone, of all the Boer's household, had found out the truth from little Sannie's sobbing complaints. Dull and heavy as she appeared, there was more in her than Jack imagined. She suspected her brother of teasing the ostrich, but was so frightened at the thought of Sannie's danger that she could not rest. Her first care was to get the boys into the garden. The Black Antelope followed with Jack's untasted breakfast — the bowl of milk and the once hot roaster-cake. There was twice as much as he could eat, but Zyl was quite ready to assist him with the overplus. They sat down together on one of the garden seats in the midst of a grove of orange-trees.

Genderen shook down some of their golden fruit to fill the English boy's pockets. Jack took out his precious *Illustrated News* to make room for them, and whilst the important business of the breakfast proceeded, Zyl stretched himself on the grass, absorbed in the delight its many pictures afforded.

When Genderen saw the two boys she had caught fighting had struck up such a sudden friendship, she felt somewhat amazed. Fearing it was too warm to last, she slipped away to execute the second part of her plan as quickly as she could. To feed the young ostrich chicks was Genderen's daily task, therefore she was not at all afraid of Vickel herself. Filling her lap with food, she went into the farm-yard, and calling her own majestic hen with her fluffy brood, began to feed them. The cries of the young birds soon brought Vickel out of the waggon. Genderen saw her bright eyes peeping over the wall at her feathered kin. Then the Dutch girl showered the corn from her lap, inviting Vickel to come over the wall and share the feast; but the ostrich was shy, and retreated.

"No, she cannot get over the wall," thought the Dutch girl; "and if I can but coax her into the yard, she will be safe out of the children's way, or there will be more mischief between them, for somehow or other this bird is at the bottom of it."

Acting upon this conviction she did her utmost to tempt the clever bird to follow her, but in vain. At last she set the gate wide open, and leading out the biggest of her chickens, she let them walk before the waggon, trusting that Vickel would join them of her own accord. Ostriches have a decided partiality for women and girls, and when Genderen began to call her chicks together, Vic put her head on one side and listened.

The impression was deepened when a few grains of corn were flung at Vickel's feet. She eyed them askance for a while, but as the chicks moved on she condescended to taste. Having once tasted, and found the breakfast Genderen provided for her chicks was much better than her own, she continued to follow them slowly and at a considerable distance, picking up the grains of corn Genderen was careful to scatter in their rear. As the girl drew near the gate the Hottentot came to her assistance. A heap of corn was placed in Vickel's sight to invite her to enter; and when she hovered hesitatingly round the gate of plenty, the cowherd cracked his whip behind her. In she flew with a bound. The gate was gently closed, and Jack's pet was a prisoner. Genderen, very happy in the success of her manœuvre, returned to the house.

Beautiful as the Boer's garden seemed to Jack on that lovely summer morning, he did not care to stay there long. His father had told him he must take care of all the things in the waggon, and he wanted to go back to it. But Zyl, who valued the pictures in the *Illustrated News* almost more than Jack himself, was loath to let them go. His sullen face lit up at the sight of men on horseback with their dogs at their side, and soldiers drawn up in battle array. Tents, too, and Japanese pagodas, all of which he must scrutinize until each picture was made out to his own satisfaction.

Jack's impatience nearly upset the good understanding so recently established between them ; but nothing could turn the young Boer from his purpose. He had made up his mind to see all there was to be seen in the beautiful English paper, and he would. To add to Jack's uneasiness he was sure he heard his ostrich calling ; but after his father's charge to take care of the paper, he was afraid to go away without it. He tried to take it out of Zyl's hand, promising to bring it again ; but Zyl, who could not understand Jack's English, only retorted, "Jah ! jah !" and held it fast.

Then Jack ran to the gate, but Zyl was before him. The upper bolt, which was high above Jack's head, was drawn, and the Dutch boy stood laughing. Then he gave Jack a brotherly hug, and led him round the garden.

"Don't go," said Zyl by every action. He put back the little linen tents which were dotted about the beds, and showed him the lovely flowers blooming beneath their grateful shadows.

Oh, what a contrast to Jack's garden at home ! The roses here seemed to spring up as easily as thistles, and the tulips from the Dutchman's "father-land" seemed to Jack, with his exceeding love of flowers, like fairy bells. And then the grapes and the peaches, shining in their glossy leaves, filled him with wonder and admiration. How was it all done ? Why could not their garden at home be made like it ?



FEEDING THE OSTRICH CHICKS.



He began to think these rough Boers knew more than he did after all. Perhaps he could find out how they managed it.

There was one particular corner at which Zyl paused with evident pride. It was a perfect square, marked off from the rest of the garden by a row of flowering cactus. In the angle of the wall stood a clumsy, three-cornered stool, which Zyl endeavoured to make Jack understand was his own handiwork. The frame of an old umbrella had been nailed to the wall, and as its silk covering had altogether disappeared, it had been skilfully thatched with grass. Two young creeping-plants were making haste to climb the wall to reach it.

A small orange-tree, which could have seen little more than a single summer, was planted in the very centre of the little square, with a ring of ice-plants round it, brought from an unfrequented dell among the neighbouring rocks. A circular path divided this from the side borders, where Jack observed an abundant crop of seed springing up in the shape of a Dutch "Z." This was enough for Jack. He guessed at once it was Zyl's own garden. How he envied him the possession. But this was a bad feeling, and Jack crushed it in its birth, smothering it with a burning desire to emulate the Dutch boy's skill, and, if possible, surpass it.

"I must have the seat big enough for two," thought Jack, "and father and I could have our supper there."

So the time slid by until Genderen returned, leading Sannie in a clean pinafore, with both her chubby hands filled with sweets, the Dutch child's delight. She held out one to Jack, who had given her the "beauty picture." As he stooped to take it, he softly parted the curly mop of flaxen hair, and looked ruefully at the darkening bruise it shaded. This reminded him of Vickel.

"I must, I ought to go and look after her," he thought.

Now, Jack could climb like a cat; and as he despaired of making his new friends understand how much he wanted to go back to his father's waggon, he suddenly leaped upon Zyl's seat, and was over the wall in a moment. His astonished companions stared after him with their fingers in their mouths, utterly amazed. They would have said only a Kafir could have done it.

Once outside the wall of Jaarsveldt, Jack ran eagerly to the waggon. The oxen were leisurely ruminating. Everything was right but Vickel. Where was Vickel? A cry of bitter self-reproach burst from his lips. He tried to call her name, but his voice failed him. All the terrible excitement he had undergone seemed to culminate in that moment. A cold shiver ran through him, for this new trouble was of his own making. If he had not left Vickel so long he would not have lost her. He was blaming himself too keenly to know what he was doing. He

tried to call her, but his voice sounded hoarse, and unlike his own. The echo from the neighbouring rocks repeated his heart-breaking call. He did not know what an echo was, and believed that some one else was calling his bird in the distance. Off he set, as fast as he could go, hoping to overtake the unknown somebody who was tempting his pet away. Once he thought he heard his ostrich screaming behind him. He paused, completely bewildered. No; it was only Zyl shouting to him to stop. But Jack had had enough of Zyl's company for the present, and would not comply. So the two chased each other over the red sand, nearer and nearer to those sombre masses of frowning brown which had exercised such a power over Jack's imagination.

The heat was now intense, but there was neither sight nor sound of Vickel. He ran till he could run no further, and had hardly breath enough left to call her name. Then he remembered Genderen's oranges, and sitting down under one of the low karroo bushes, which reminded him of home, he began to eat them. This helped him to recover his voice, and putting both hands to his mouth he once more shouted, "Vickel," and again the rocks gave back his cry.

At this moment an ox-cart drove slowly out of one of the rocky defiles, in the direction of Jaarsveldt. Zyl, who was gaining on his flying friend, saw it also, and apparently recognizing the two men who were in it, waved his hat and shouted in his turn.

The Hottentot driver turned the head of his ox towards the boys, whilst his companion answered Zyl with the “view halloo” of an English sportsman.

Jack sprang to his feet at the sound of an English voice, realizing for the first time in his life all that word “countryman” means in a foreign land.

The ox-cart rumbled on. Zyl was running to meet it with eager joy. Jack had no eyes for the Hottentot driver; all his attention was centred on the big sun-umbrella which almost covered his companion.

As the boys came up to the cart, it was swung backwards. The owner of the umbrella, an aristocratic-looking young Englishman of twenty-two or twenty-three, held out his hand to Zyl with a smile. It was a pleasant smile as far as it went, for it only played around his lips; it never reached his eyes. About them there was a reckless, “don’t care” expression which rather repelled Jack; but Zyl was obviously delighted to meet him.

“Please, sir, have you seen an ostrich?” asked Jack.

“Yes, dozens, my little man. But what is that to you?” was the somewhat curt reply.

“Please, sir, I have lost my Vickel, my own tame ostrich, and I have heard somebody calling her over there, the way you came,” added Jack, pointing to the rocks.

“Somebody!” repeated the stranger, shaking with laughter; “I rather think it was Mr. Nobody. You

little fool, to go chasing an echo! Come, jump in, both of you; for we are all risking a sunstroke crossing the veldt at noon. I did not bargain to be so late, I assure you."

Then he turned to Zyl and asked some questions in Dutch, to which the young Boer responded with more alacrity than usual. He scrambled up into the cart at once, trying to pull Jack after him.

"No, thanks," persisted Jack; "I don't want to ride; I must find my bird."

"Nonsense!" retorted the stranger. "Jump in this minute, or you will lose yourself. And where on earth will you be so likely to find your bird as in the ostrich-camp at the next farm?"

"Perhaps you are right, sir," said Jack brightening.

"Boys do not say 'perhaps' to me," he continued, seating the two between himself and the Hottentot driver, who was by no means pleasant as a near neighbour on so hot a day. Zyl got close to the Englishman, as if he had a special right to appropriate him; so Jack turned to the Hottentot, who did not laugh at his trouble, and promised readily, if he saw an ostrich with scorched wings, to catch her. Jack ventured to ask him in a whisper who the Englishman was that he was driving.

"He no father of mine," answered the driver; for to him father and master meant the same. "He be a Ingleese, who come and go from farm to farm, and he

do cram little boys' heads with big words for three long days, till they sleepy, sleepy."

At this description of himself and his present occupation as itinerant schoolmaster the Englishman laughed until he shook again. Then he laid one arm on Zyl's broad shoulders, and leaned across to question Jack.

"What makes you so curious about me?" he asked.

"Because you are an Englishman, and so is my father," replied the little fellow.

"Then I have a great mind to come and see him and cram your empty head; but mind you, if I find you going sleepy, sleepy, this will pretty quickly wake you up again," retorted the boyish schoolmaster, shaking the cane he carried.

Jack grew very red, being painfully conscious of his own short-comings; but he answered manfully, "I shouldn't be sleepy in the morning."

"All right," laughed the schoolmaster. "Zyl has been telling me all about you, John Treby, junior. Just give that to your father," he continued, tearing a leaf out of his pocket-book on which was written, "Sandford Algarkirke."

"Father will come back to Jaarsveldt to fetch me and the waggon, and then I will give it to him," answered Jack promptly.

"Will he come to-night?"

"Oh yes," answered Jack.

"Better and better!" cried young Algarkirke;

"then I shall see him to-night. I have not spoken to an Englishman for seven months. What part of the old country did your father come from ?"

"Nottingham," returned Jack. "He told me only last night—no, I mean the last night at home, just before the thieves came—never to forget I have a grandfather living at Nottingham."

"Nottingham!" exclaimed Algarkirke in a tone that bordered on alarm, while for a moment the reckless "don't care" expression was banished from his brow.

VI.

THREE DAYS WITH THE BOOKS.

THE arrival of the schoolmaster quickened the slow paces of the Boer's family. The thrifty "tante" was anxious to make the most of his three days' sojourn.

The Black Antelope had dragged off Zyl and Sannie to the wash-tub. Being in disgrace already, they submitted, but not without a pout and a grimace at the inordinate scrubbing the zealous creature thought it her duty to inflict. Genderen, she insisted, ought to show her respect for "the man of books" by taking off the long checked pinafore and exhibiting the brightly-flowered cotton dress beneath it.

The Black Antelope's veneration for a man who could make a white sheet talk, by just sprinkling it with something black, knew no bounds. She would have remained all day watching her charges whilst the lessons were going forward if her mistress would have allowed it, on the *qui vive* for other magical performances perhaps as wonderful. This was certainly a sign that pen and ink were not often required

in the Boer's household when the schoolmaster was not present.

Tante Milligen was seated on the lumbering settee, smoothing down the sides of her voluminous apron, whilst the schoolmaster did justice to the ample lunch she had provided for him. Whilst he ate, she enlarged upon her own and her husband's satisfaction with their present arrangements. She hoped they were doing their duty by their children. They had always taken them to church twice a year, although it was such a long way to Pretoria; but now they had a schoolmaster in the neighbourhood again, they must all make up for lost time.

Young Algarkirke was not slow at taking a hint, so he professed himself quite ready to begin lessons at once.

The Black Antelope bustled in her charges, with their freckled faces polished to a deep rose-pink, and arranged the chairs. Books were brought out and selected from the heterogeneous contents of the capacious cupboard, and slates were dusted.

Sandford Algarkirke looked at Sannie with some dismay, for she was an addition to the party quite outside his hopes or expectations.

"She is young," remarked Tante Milligen; "but she will have to make a beginning some day, and there is no time like the present. We don't keep any schoolmaster amongst us over-long, and then there is often a year or two before we get another to settle, so I

hope you will let her take her turn with her brother and sister."

Forthwith the assiduous Kafir produced an additional cushion, which raised the would-be learner to the level of the big table, and darting upon a Latin grammar Mr. Algarkirke had just taken out of his own pocket, she laid it open before her with great solemnity.

"That will do," said Tante Milligen, pointing her domestic to the door. "Now bring me that pinafore, and I'll see how I can patch it."

"Inkosi! (Kafir for mistress) inkosi!" exclaimed the excited black, "one word, and I will trouble your ears no more this day. The little Ingleese lamb without a mother lies weeping in the dust by his father's oxen. Why? Because he is shut out while the books speak. Open to him, inkosi, that he too may learn wisdom."

"Listen to our black spider," muttered Zyl. "Has not she got eyes all round her head, and feet that can run every way at once? Oh, we are just dummies and blocks beside her."

"Be still," whispered Genderen; "she'll get him in."

"Let him come, then," said Tante Milligen.

"By all means," added the schoolmaster warmly.

A swifter messenger than the Black Antelope never lived. She ran at her fastest now. The fleetness of her foot had won for her her name. But her volatility was lost on Jack, who could not understand

any one of the endearing epithets she showered upon him. It was true he was crying bitterly, but her conjecture as to the cause of his grief was quite a mistake, for he was mourning over his folly in losing sight of Vickel.

She caught him by both his hands and whirled him away to the door of the sit-kamé, where Zyl was stumbling through a page of Dutch history, about which his teacher knew nothing, whilst Genderen, with her fingers in her mouth and her low forehead drawn into most painful puckers, was trying hard to cast up an addition sum.

Mr. Algarkirke's knowledge of Dutch had been picked up during a short stay in Amsterdam before he emigrated, and when he found himself at a loss for a word, he recalled attention by a rap with his cane. Genderen sighed heavily, and Zyl tugged at his forelock. Lessons with the Dutch children were a very laborious matter. If they had not been so fully alive to their importance, the new schoolmaster would have been a failure. With stolid gravity Zyl pulled through blunders his master was quite unable to rectify, and closed his book at last with an air of satisfaction that would have convulsed an English school with merriment.

Mr. Algarkirke seated Jack beside him, for an English child was a welcome addition to his pupils; but alas! the school-books were all in Dutch, except the Latin grammar, at which Sannie was profoundly staring.

“ May I do a sum ? ” asked Jack, who knew “ the good spell at the figures ” did not come off so frequently as his father desired.

Jack found it much easier to grapple with the difficulties of long division in the day-time, when he was wide awake, than in his brief but pleasant lessons between winks, when his father was often more weary than himself. He said he should like a good spell at arithmetic, using his father’s words a little proudly ; but when Mr. Algarkirke rewarded his painstaking by setting him another and a longer example in money division, he felt himself becoming something worse than sleepy, for he was downright stupid at the conclusion.

“ Please, Mr. Algarkirke, may I have a book ? ” he asked.

“ Touch a book with such dirty paws ! ” retorted the schoolmaster, who had considerably widened the distance between them. “ No, sir ; no, I say.”

Jack crimsoned to the roots of his hair, and hid his hands under the table. The schoolmaster grumbled something in Dutch. All eyes turned on Jack.

“ A travelling schoolmaster expects his pupils to be ready for him. It is not treating me with proper respect to come here covered with soot and dust,” he continued sharply.

Jack got up slowly and went to the door. The Black Antelope was told off to recall him ; but her ready wit had already divined the cause of Mr. Algar-

kirke's offence. Poor, disconcerted Jack was whirled away into one of the side-rooms, where tub and towel awaited him.

The touch of his hot head and burning hands distressed her, and ere the bathing was finished she felt quite sure the poor child would be prostrate with African fever before many hours were over. Should she tell her mistress? The Boers were so hard and unfeeling to their slaves, the Kafir could not depend upon their sympathy. But her woman's heart went forth to the poor white lamb without a mother, and she made up her mind to steal out at night and watch over him, if he were sent back into the waggon to sleep alone.

She took away his burnt and blackened clothes, and dressed him in a cast-off suit of Zyl's; but the shirt and trousers were immensely too big, so she rolled up the sleeves of the former to his elbows and the legs of the trousers to his knces. In place of a belt, she found a large scarlet and orange handkerchief of the "oom's," and wound it round Jack's waist, dancing round him with delight, and shouting to a sister Kafir, who was pounding home-grown pepper in the entrance court, to come and admire his little shell-like ears, his shapely knces, etc. Jack, who could not understand her lavish praise, felt supremely ridiculous when she led him back to the sit-kamé, where the business of school was proceeding rapidly. A hearty laugh greeted Jack's transformation.

“ You need not have leaped from a chimney-sweep to a merry-andrew,” observed Mr. Algarkirke, as the mirth subsided, “ and you an English boy.”

Slow of speech as Zyl and Genderen habitually were, they resented the tones of reproach in which these words were spoken. Dropping an unwary ink-spot on her copybook as she gathered up her courage, Genderen began the story of the fire, which Zyl confirmed with sundry snorts of vengeance against the thievish Kafirs.

“ And so they brought you here just as they pulled you out of the flames!” exclaimed the young Englishman. “ Why did not you tell me this before, Jack ?”

Tante Milligen began to think the interruption had been too prolonged, so she got up and reminded the new teacher that Sannie had not yet had her turn. The young Englishman, who would have been at his ease in the lecture-room of an Oxford professor, inwardly groaned. His disgust at the sight of the little blue-checked bundle that was dog’s-earing his Latin grammar exceeded Jack’s on the preceding evening. But happily for him no alphabet could be found in any one of the time-worn school-books Tante Milligen had produced. They had already served the educational needs of three generations, and many a loose page had disappeared in the process. What was to be done ? Tante Milligen was rummaging her cupboard, but in vain.

Jack, who was sitting on a corner of Zyl’s chair,

helping him through the mazes of his multiplication, looked up brightly, and offered to cut out an alphabet with his knife if he might have a loose book lid which was lying on the table.

But the process of alphabet cutting proved so interesting to Zyl and Genderen they could do nothing but watch it, until Mr. Algarkirke banished Jack and his knife to the back of the settee. Sannie crept after him unperceived, and learnt her first lesson unawares, for Jack had chosen a nice sized capital "A" on the title-page of the Latin grammar, which he got her to hold before him as a pattern; but the little fat fingers let the leaves fly over a dozen times. The bruise on her forehead made Jack wince every time he caught sight of the blue-green shadow. He was patience itself, and turning back to his copy pointed to it with a smile, sometimes finding another A, and sometimes turning back to the title-page with which he started, until at last Sannie's finger followed his as she drawled out, "Das is ein" (that is one); and she was right. Whilst Jack was at work on the B, Sannie fitted her card A to the corresponding capital in the pages of the grammar.

By the time Jack reached the eighth letter his material was exhausted. He passed them quietly to Mr. Algarkirke, and sat down again, resting his aching head against the back of the settee, unnoticed by any one, whilst Sannie was called up for her first lesson.

With a disdainful curl of the lip, as if he were con-

descending to the very dust, Mr. Algarkirke laid the letters in order, and mounting the too juvenile pupil on the chair beside him, informed her with much preceptorial display that A was the first letter of the alphabet and the first of the vowels.

Sannie made answer with a long-drawn “Jah!” and held up the Latin grammar.

“That,” said he, taking the volume from her to conceal the laughter that was choking him—“that is a little beyond you. One step at a time.”

Sannie stared at him with one hand in her mouth, duly impressed with the solemnity of the occasion. Whilst he consulted the four corners of the room as to what he should say next, Jack guessed his dilemma, and renewed his petition for a book. The Latin grammar was handed to him. As Jack took it he swept the letters into a heap, and smiling at the round baby face, almost ready to dissolve in tears, he pointed to the A on the title-page.

“Well done, my little Dutchwoman!” exclaimed Mr. Algarkirke as Sannie picked out the cardboard duplicate from the little heap of letters and held it up to Jack.

Tante Milligen let her hands fall upon her lap. It was wonderful. Mr. Algarkirke’s reputation as a schoolmaster was established for ever.

“Allamachter!” she exclaimed, “why I was full three months before they got me to see the difference between one letter and another. No more German

teachers for me. You can't beat the English at work. They take it all square. We must make much of him."

The Black Antelope was quite ready to echo her mistress's opinion. Feeling she had now seen both tutor and pupils fairly started on the road to learning, Tante Milligen withdrew to her kitchen, having been assured for the last half-hour that the roast was burning.

Mr. Algarkirke coughed ominously.

"Jack," he whispered in an English aside, "you are a brick. You have helped me over the worst bit of drudgery in my day's work. Now, if there is anything I can do for you or your father, you must tell me."

"Please, sir," cried Jack, brightening, "will *you* sell father a coat?"

"If I were not so wretchedly down in my luck I would give him one, but anyhow he shall have it for a trifle," answered Algarkirke, "if he wishes."

Jack scarcely longed for evening more earnestly than his young countryman, who knew not how to keep the attention of his stolid pupils through the sleepy heat of an Africen afternoon. The room was like an oven. Algarkirke was painfully conscious the slow intellects of the Boer's children were gaining from him nothing but a jumble of confused ideas. School in the wilderness is a difficult matter, manage as you will. Genderen's sleepy yawn, which she was

unable longer to repress, reminded the young tutor of the Hottentot.

A bright thought occurred to him—an object lesson out of doors. Weights and measures taught amid the heaps of corn in Van Immerseel's granary would be made clear to the most sluggish understanding. The "fatted calf," as he chose to designate poor Sannie, was snoring at his feet. He left her undisturbed to the enjoyment of her siesta, and marched out the other two, slate in hand, to their own favourite resort, the farm-yard. Jack followed wearily. At that moment he would have been content to share the sheep-skin in the corner.

The Hottentot herdsman stood grinning at the novel proceeding. With bushel and strike, steelyard and sack, Zyl was at home; and Genderen, with her pencil between her lips, noting down the figures at Mr. Algarkirke's dictation, seemed a different being. Jack stood nearest to the door. A tug at his sleeve made him look round. There was his Vickel, with her queenly breast and outspread wings, obviously intent upon dragging out her little master into the free, fresh air, to share with her the pleasures of a straw-stack, in which she had been revelling with her new-found kin. Jack forgot everything in his joy at seeing her again.

But Zyl, whose remembrance of her attack in the morning was as vivid as ever, banged up the door and shut them both out.

Jack was now feeling too ill to wish to return. He went with Vickel to the rustling straw, and was soon fast asleep, with his aching head pillow'd on Vickel's downy breast.

He awoke with a shiver, for the evening dews were falling. The ostrich was roosting beside him, with her head under her wing. The farm-yard gate was shut; but it was easy to get on to the wall from the top of the stack. Jack did not disturb his bird; for he thought if she began to clamour, the noise would be heard indoors, and some one would be sure to come and fetch him. He longed to be left alone. He wanted nobody but his father, and he would look for him where he had left him in the early morning. So Jack let himself drop down the other side of the wall and crept into the waggon.

VII.

THE BLACK ANTELOPE.

THE evening darkened into night, but Jack's father did not return. Tante Milligen had sent her Kafir maid to look for Jack, and when she heard he was asleep in his father's waggon she thought it best to leave him there. But the kind-hearted Black Antelope was troubled, for his restless sleep convinced her the fever was upon him. She had washed his sooty clothes for pure love of his fair English face, and laid them by him in the waggon.

Among the few trifles which had been saved from the fire was Mr. Treby's drinking-flask, which was in the pocket of his coat, but had not been destroyed with it. Before he departed he had filled it with water for Jack's benefit, and left it, with the remains of the dinner Tottie had provided, by the sleeping child. Jack could not touch the bone of cold mutton or the crust of bread, but he drank the water. He fell asleep with the flask in his hands. It had been a keepsake from an English friend, and Mr. Treby's name was engraved upon the silver stopper.

The night was intensely hot, and the moon was near the full. The light of the lamp still streamed through the half-open door of the sit-kamé, where Tante Milligen was awaiting the return of her husband and son. Most of the Kafir servants had been dismissed to their huts for the night.

Sandford Algarkirke, preferring the company of the fireflies to the conversation of the Boeress, had retreated to the orange grove, where he too was listening for the first sound of the horses' feet. But they were scarcely audible, for the weary travellers rode slowly over the sandy veldt, and were within sight of the farm before any one at home was aware of their presence.

The Black Antelope had just paid her last visit to the fever-stricken child. She found him trying to drain another drop from the now empty flask. She took it from him, intending to refill it, and was stepping out of the waggon with it in her hand when the "oom" rode up.

In that brilliant moonlight he saw the silver-mounted flask in the black girl's hand as clearly as if it had been noonday, and so did Mr. Treby, who rode beside him. Believing she had stolen it from the waggon, the Boer leaped from his horse and struck her such a blow with his clenched fist that she lay moaning on the ground.

"Bread of mine was never yet broken by a thief, and never shall be!" he exclaimed indignantly, snatch-

ing the flask from her unresisting hand and returning it to Mr. Treby.

The gate of Jaarsveldt was flung open as Tante Milligen and the schoolmaster ran out to ascertain the cause of the commotion. The rest of the party spurred forward ; but amidst the stamping of hoofs and the neighing of horses, the Boer's stentorian voice was heard denouncing the guilty hand that dared to touch the Englishman's goods in his absence.

“ What is he saying ? ” asked Jack's father in an anxious aside to the German Otto.

The shepherd translated his master's words, adding, “ Your things are safe enough under Van Immerseel's protection.”

“ Jah ! jah ! ” cried Walt, who was standing behind them. “ We'll show you in the morning how we punish a thief at Jaarsveldt. Such gentry, be their colour what it may, had better not come here.”

The noise had effectually roused poor Jack from his feverish sleep. He saw the Black Antelope, who had been so kind to him all day, staggering to her feet ; but he saw his father in the group, and scrambling out of the waggon, he rushed to him, gasping, “ Don't let them hurt her, father dear ! Oh, don't ! don't ! ” For the Boer had doubled up his gigantic fist to deal a second blow.

Mr. Treby stepped forward and caught Van Immerseel's arm, expressing his heartfelt thanks for his

timely intervention, yet adding a plea for mercy to the delinquent.

The Kafir girl cast one loving look of gratitude on Jack, and slunk away into the shadows.

Tante Milligen, with her arms akimbo, was warmly applauding her husband's conduct.

Sandford Algarkirke had drawn back into the garden. He held the gate in his hand, and was listening attentively to every word.

"Please, sir," cried Jack excitedly, "you can make these people understand. Do come and tell them the poor Kafir girl only went to fetch me some more water. I am sure she did not mean to steal the flask."

"Then say so," was the brief reply; "but do not drag me into the matter."

"Of course I would, if I could speak their Dutch. I ought, I must; but they do not know what I am saying, so it is of no use. But you can explain it; and if you do not they will beat her dreadfully," urged Jack. "We must not let the innocent suffer. It is not right, Mr. Algarkirke."

"Come along, then," returned the young schoolmaster, and taking Jack's hand he led him into the house, where the travellers were already seated round the supper-table.

"This little fellow has asked me to be his interpreter," said Algarkirke as he repeated Jack's assertion.

But the burly Dutchman only laughed.

"Say no more now, Jack," interposed his father, making room for his boy beside him. "Circumstances are very much against her."

"And circumstances weigh so heavily when you have only innocence without proof to balance them in the other scale; but she is happy to have even a child like you to believe in her," added the young schoolmaster, with a bitterness that made Jack's father think, "Some personal experience, something in your own life, gave its sting to that remark."

"She will never pilfer again," remarked Walt; "she is too true a Kafir for that. There is the dog-nature in them all—just the same sort of fidelity, and all that."

So the talk ran on, and in the discussions over more important matters the Black Antelope was forgotten by all but Jack and the schoolmaster.

The sheep-tracks had been carefully traced, but they did not lead to the district of the free Kafirs in the valleys among the rocks. Mr. Treby began to think his Tottie was right in her estimate of the thieves. But the scare had spread through the whole district. The police would be here in the morning, and until they had investigated the matter, watch must be kept, for fear the aggressors should return and attack another of the lonely farms which dotted the sandy waste.

Mr. Treby had encountered his white-haired Hottentot Seco returning. He brought him word that

the new settler at Scarsdorp found the wild life in that vast karroo too rough for his taste, and had previously decided to change his sheep-farm and try tobabeeo-growing in Natal. The news which Seeo carried made him hasten his departure all he could. He would "trek" at once (as the Afriean settlers say when they move, using the old Duteh word their neighbours the Boers have made familiar throughout the district), if he could buy or hire another waggon to carry the rest of his goods.

Mr. Treby caught at the opportunity this offered him to retrieve his fortunes. He decided to place his waggon and oxen at his neighbour's service. For this he would receive a good round sum. He would drive it himself; and when he had delivered the goods he must start for Kimberley and dig for diamonds, until he had gained money enough to rebuild his house and stock his farm. Van Immerseel was ready to hire his pasture for the rest of the season, and pay him on his return—not with money, but with sheep.

Jack, of course, would go with him, for he could work with him at the diamond diggings. Jaek could manage a sieve; his young eyes would be as sharp as his own to pick out the sparkling diamonds as he sifted the loosened earth in which they were embedded. The journey would give his burned arm time to recover its natural strength, before he shouldered mattock and spade among the crowds of busy workers at the Kimberley diggings.

Such were the plans that Mr. Treby was revolving, as he did justice to the cold mutton and steaming coffee Tante Milligen had provided for the travellers.

"It is chancey work at the diamond mines," remarked the "oom." "A fellow may dig for weeks and get nothing but dirt for his pains; or he may make his fortune in a day."

"I can only try," answered Jack's father; "and with God's blessing I may pull round before another year."

How the young schoolmaster listened, as if he longed to follow his example.

Otto had been to Kimberley, and he described the giant circle, where the diamonds were to be found. So much earth had been already scooped away that he could liken it to nothing but an enormous basin, filled with men of all colours, grubbing in the earth like human ants. He spoke of its ceaseless toil and its uncertain gains.

But Mr. Treby still repeated, "I can only try. Hard work won't frighten me."

It was the look on Jack's face that was frightening him. He saw the feverish flush and the glittering eyes, and felt him shiver as the child crept closer and closer to his side.

"What is the matter, my boy?" he whispered.

But Jack did not reply. The group of rough, bearded men hastily snatching a supper seemed to him no better than the unreal phantoms of a troubled

dream. Tante Milligen's broad, quaint figure, with her bare arms and borderless cap, seemed everywhere. The talk of dangers and daring thrilled through his over-excited brain ; and then, worse than all, the great trap-door in the ceiling over his head appeared to open and shut of itself. The plum-stones which studded the floor seemed to dance before his eyes, until he hardly knew where he was. But his father's arm was around him, and to that he clung desperately.

When he came to himself his father was pouring something down his throat from a cow's horn ; Tante Milligen held a candle in her hand, and was saying something in Dutch. Jack caught the oft-repeated word "slaap-kamé" (sleep-chamber). At last she opened the door into one of the side rooms, in which Jack could distinguish the curtains of a huge four-post bed. The room felt hot and stifling as his father carried him in and laid him down upon the softest pillow Jack had ever known. Tante Milligen stuck the candle she carried somewhere in the wall.

"There is no sleep for me to-night," said Jack's father. "I do not expect any disturbance ; but come what may, I can keep watch within doors."

"And I shall share your vigil," interposed the school-master ; "so your little boy can occupy this room (where I was to have slept) undisturbed. Don't say no, for a dash of adventure has all imaginable charms for me."

According to Dutch fashion, every breath of air

was carefully excluded from the room, so Mr. Treby set the door ajar, and the light from the lamp on the supper-table streamed across the floor.

An old Hottentot woman, with her shrivelled, yellow hand, brought a cool leaf to lay on Jack's forehead, and muttered something over him like a charm.

Tante Milligen herself fetched a pitcher of herbal tea, and then, with many maternal shakings of her head and sundry commiserative sounds, departed to her own slaap-kamé on the other side of the great room, into which all the doors of the house seemed to open, for the Boer's house was but one story high. There were lofts in the roof, where stores were kept, but these were reached by a wooden ladder outside the house, or through the trap-door which had had so large a share in Jack's delirious fancies.

He could have slept now, poor boy, but for the snoring duet that was kept up by the little sisters on the other side of the wall.

The Kafir servants, who had been playing scout all day by turns, came in to report that all was quiet. Walt decided to go with Otto to his hut by the sheep-kraals, as on the preceding night. Van Immerseel was persuaded to lie down on his bed; but he would not undress, so that he could be roused at a moment's notice.

Walt looked in at Mr. Treby before he departed. They showed each other their loaded rifles, and nodded significantly, as if to say, "We are ready." Otto,

who had followed, stooped down and picked up something from the floor.

“ My knife ! ” cried Jack, starting upright.

“ All right,” said his father, laying him gently upon the pillows again.

The German backed into the outer room.

Thinking the entrance of the young men disturbed his Jack, Mr. Treby followed his example, and taking Walt by the arm, went out also.

Swarms of those hard-winged, spotted flies danced round and round the candle, until they stuck fast in the burning tallow. A menacing mosquito buzzed in the curtains of the bed, and banished Jack’s last chance of sleep.

At last the house grew still. Mr. Treby set the door of Jack’s room wide open, so that he might feel the refreshing night-breeze from the open windows of the sit-kamé.

Believing that his child was dozing, he sat down by the door, with his face buried in his hands. Algar-kirke waited impatiently for his reverie to end. At last he said, “ We are countrymen, and in a distant land like this that means friends, and almost brothers, does it not ? ”

“ Of course, of course,” returned Mr. Treby absently.

“ Then whatever you may have heard about me from your Nottingham friends, you will not repeat it here.”

“ I ! ” returned Jack’s father, rousing ; “ I know

nothing about you, an utter stranger. I can have nothing to tell. It is years since I left Nottingham."

"It may be useless to ask you to believe me, when I say it was nothing but my own abominable carelessness made me the victim of circumstances," he went on bitterly. "And those who called themselves my friends chose rather to expatriate me than investigate."

"Young man," interrupted Jack's father, "I ask you for no confession; but if you wish to confide in me, every word you utter will be safe. But I must remind you beforehand that a man driven to asking help of his neighbours is not one to look to, to give it."

"You think me a flat," muttered Algarkirke.

"I think you a little too verdant," returned the other. "Whatever your bygones may have been, you have a chance of beginning a new life out here. Do not let your own self-consciousness spoil it. Bury the past, or retrieve it. Remember

"Men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

"Could I dig diamonds with you at Kimberley?" was the eager answer to these words of fatherly advice.

"Did you ever use spade or pick?" asked Mr. Treby in his turn.

But Algarkirke shook his head.

"That answers your own question," returned his

companion. "Stiek to what you can do. You've no father, my lad, or you would not have been pitchforked into these wilds and left to sink or swim. All you brought with you is lost and gone? So I expected. I only wish I could help you."

"Your little boy told me you wanted to buy a coat. I've one to spare," said Algarkirke in a jerky tone, as if the words were forced out one by one. "I left England for Amsterdam—I had a merchant friend who traded with that city—but I was soon shipped off to Africa with a letter of recommendation to a Dutch clergyman at Pretoria. I lived on my money as long as it lasted. I was in the throes of despair when the grand church-going week came round. I shall never forget my first sight of the Boers bringing up their families from long distances in the country to join in the *naehtmaal** service at their church. A bright idea occurred to my clerical friend. He found out that a schoolmaster was wanting in this district, and recommended me to the post. It was a civil way of freeing himself from a burden. I journeyed back in one of the Boer's waggons, and began the hopeless task of teaching the young idea how to shoot in broken Dutch. It is irksome drudgery; for those Dutch boys are worse than the Irishman's pig, they will neither be led nor driven. But the worst of it is, I have a few days now and then between the turns, and how to keep myself I do not

* *Nachtmaal* ("night-meal"), the Lord's Supper.

know, until the quarter-day comes to take my promised fees, small as they are."

" 'In matters of commerce the fault of the Dutch
Is in giving too little and asking too much,' "

laughed Mr. Treby. " Show me this coat, and I'll give you what I can for it."

Algarkirke went into the room for his portmanteau, which he unstrapped softly, for fear of disturbing Jack. But the little fellow was wide awake again, and very anxious to see the coat his father was going to buy. It was of gray traveller's tweed, a little stained with salt-water, but not much the worse for wear. But, alas! no endeavours could squeeze Mr. Treby's well-developed shoulders into a garment made to fit young Algarkirke's slim figure. His disappointment was excessive. He looked at the half-sovereign in Mr. Treby's hand and bit his lip. " Like my wretched luck!" he exclaimed. " But stop! I have another that I left behind me at Inderwick—a light dust-coat, too big for me. Neither is it properly my own; a friend lent it to me one wet day just before I left England. It was packed up with my luggage by mistake. ' Keep it,' he wrote, ' it is not worth returning.' You could wear that, I am sure."

" Can you let me have it before I start?" asked Mr. Treby.

" The people here have promised to send me on to the next farm; it is a part of our bargain. I will

ask the man who drives me to bring it back, if that will do. I leave here the day after to-morrow," said Algarkirke, closing his fingers over the gold Mr. Treby dropped into his hand. His exuberant gratitude was checked by the quiet remark, "We must all do as we would be done by. The strangers in the post-cart helped me yesterday, and I'm glad to be able to help you to-night."

VIII.

JACK'S FEVER.

THE herbal tea Tante Milligen had provided for the little invalid cooled the fever in his veins. When the morning came Jack was sleeping heavily. But his father could no longer watch beside him. He was obliged to return to his own farm to meet the police, who were expected to arrive that day. He was quite sure that a sufficient party of mounted police would be told off for the defence of the district directly Wilton's report reached head-quarters. The affair would be investigated; a repetition guarded against; but should he see his sheep again? Mr. Treby's heart failed him there. He knew it was wiser to leave the burning ashes of his house untouched until the police had been. He wanted to bring back Tottie to nurse his Jack now her husband had returned. But Tante Milligen said "No;" she had Hottentots enough in the house already. She did not want one that had been spoiled by these English to come there to upset her girls. The poor child should not want for proper care; she would see to that.

The Boeress was in anything but a happy frame of mind; for the Kafir girl had run away in the night, and Tante Milligen declared she had lost her right hand.

In circumstances like his, Mr. Treby could say no more. He knew he ought to feel very grateful to his Dutch neighbours for their rough and ready hospitality, and he could not endure the thought of encroaching on their kindness.

But he could not leave his boy without a word. Everything was ready for his departure, when at last Jack opened his eyes, half-frightened at his strange surroundings. But the delirious fancies of the night were over, although he felt weak and faint.

Mr. Treby began to hope it was but a slight attack of fever, and that with quiet and care he would soon be better. He was afraid to let Jack talk even about Zyl's garden, or what a naughty bird Vickel had been; and would not let him fret over the poor Black Antelope, assuring him the Boer's anger was soon over, and he had asked her master not to punish her any more.

So with a parting kiss, and a promise to come back as soon as he could, he left his boy once more. He had not seen Algarkirke that morning, for the schoolmaster had fallen asleep in the garden, under the shadow of Zyl's pent-house, which had been constructed out of the remains of his own broken umbrella—a gift he had bestowed upon the ungovernable

urchin to bribe him to sit still during his first attempt at teaching, which he was so terribly afraid would be construed into failure.

With a few forcible words about redeeming the time, Tante Milligen hunted him out of his retreat, ignoring the fact that he had omitted to put in an appearance at their early Dutch breakfast. "That was his own look-out," she said; so Genderen was ordered to place the books on the table. Every now and then Tante Milligen put her head in at the door of the sit-kamé, churn-stick in hand, "just to keep 'em at it; for they couldn't afford to pay their money for nothing."

The poor tutor, who was all the worse for his night-watch, yawned in sympathy with his scholars. Mr. Treby had set the door of Jack's room wide open, to give him all the air he could. When Sannie caught sight of his curly head among the pillows, she slid off her chair, and gathering the letters he had cut out for her in her lap, she trotted to his bed. She waddled round the slaap-kamé like a little duck, until she came to the head of the bed where Jack was lying. There was a pout on the rosy lips, and a very ominous catch in her breath, suggestive of recent tears; for Sannie, like her mother, was sorely distressed at the disappearance of the Black Antelope, who had fondled her from her birth. One little fat hand unclosed and displayed a bit of a dirty card; then the precious letters in her lap were spread out before

him, intimating the young lady's desire to repeat the pleasure of yesterday.

Jack thought of his knife, and sprang out of bed to search for it. He shook his pockets inside out, but oh ! his knife was nowhere to be found. He put his hand to his head to try to think. Yes, he remembered distinctly. He was sure now that German shepherd had picked it up.

Sannie was frightened when she saw him crawling under the bed, for he thought he would look everywhere about the floor; so she set up a cry, which brought the old Hottentot woman to see what was the matter. Without more ado she drove out Sannie, seized Jack by the arms and put him back into bed, charging him with imperative gestures to keep there.

Tante Milligen followed with some more of that odious herbal tea, which she compelled him to drink. Then mistress and maid stood over him in earnest consultation. A huge pair of scissors was produced from Tante Milligen's capacious pocket. He hoped she was not going to cut off his head, and felt enormously relieved when he found it was only his hair she wanted. He wondered what she could want it for. Oh, it was wretched to be with people who could not understand a single word. Yet he almost laughed when he saw the shrivelled yellow fingers of the Hottentot sweeping away his curls with evident satisfaction. "They would stuff a good pin-cushion," he thought; but they left the heap on the floor, and

covered his head with a cabbage-leaf. It seemed so ridiculous, but he was obliged to submit. Then the room was darkened, and the heavy curtains of the bed were closely drawn, and he heard the door shut as they went away. He thought he was suffocating, but at length the darkness and the quiet melted into dreamy sleep. By-and-by they brought him some brandy-posset, which he could not drink. In that darkened room the day seemed like night. No one came near him but Tante Milligen, with the cow's horn in her hand; and in spite of his wry faces, she always contrived to get the thin end of the horn between his teeth, and then there was nothing for it but to gulp down the bitter draught it contained as quickly as he could.

Jack believed he had had seven nights already, and yet his father did not come. Algarkirke strolled in at last, with his pipe in his mouth, and roundly asserted there had been no night at all yet, although he hoped one was coming.

Then Jack unfolded his idea about the pin-cushions, and confided to the schoolmaster how much he would like to do the stuffing. "It is my own hair, so they might let me," he added, a little annoyed by the laugh with which this suggestion was received. Then he remembered his knife, and entreated Mr. Algarkirke to look for it in the sit-kamé. "I know," he persisted, "that German picked it up; but where could he put it?"

Algarkirke promised to tell Zyl, and persuade him to undertake the search. But his promise was of the pie-crust order, made to be broken. He wished to pacify the sick child, but, pitying the poor Black Antelope, he did not wish to cast a suspicion on any one else. He seemed sensitive on the subject, and shrank from it, even with Jack ; so he did not mention the knife to any one.

Mr. Algarkirke was soon superseded by the Hottentot, who sat down on the foot of the bed and stared at Jack, who shut his eyes so that he should not see her. Then he seemed to feel all round him the flames of his burning home ; and yet it was not his Tottie crawling out of the sloot, but the ugly face of this stranger Hottentot that was staring at him between the curtains of the bed.

To all his feverish mutterings she responded with a "Jah ! jah !" which sounded more like the cluck of a hen than a woman's voice. But she gave him mutton-broth and grapes, and forced him to lie still ; for Jack had an unconquerable longing to get up and walk about. He told her again and again he must go and meet his father, but he might as well have spoken to a post.

One thing he was truly grateful for. The Hottentot armed herself with a long bough, and every now and then set vigorously to work to drive away the flies, which had teased him so the night before. Yet the sleep he longed for refused to come, until he heard

the lowing of the cows as they were driven in for milking, and then the wakefulness of the night was exchanged for a drowsy stupor, which lasted through the glaring noonday heat.

"They have made me a bed in the oven," moaned Jack, when the schoolmaster looked in on the third day to bid him "good-bye."

"I shall send the coat," he said; "I hope it will fit your father. I shall miss your little English face when I come to Jaarsveldt next time, for I suppose then you will be sifting diamonds at Kimberley. You must learn a little of their wonderful Dutch patience from your new friends. I hope your father will come back before I start."

But the young Englishman's wish was not gratified. Mr. Treby did not return until the next morning.

At the sight of his father Jack revived. The fever had turned at the third day, and Jack began to rally. Mr. Treby's gratitude to the worthy "tante" for her motherly care knew no bounds. She had saved his child. But when he talked of taking him away, Van Immerseel laid his great hand on his arm and shook the other in his face, with a good-natured laugh, which tempered a flat refusal.

Tante Milligen summoned her ancient Hottentot, and five black faces appeared above the half-door of the sit-kamé to back her protestation and convince the anxious father he must leave his child where he was or a relapse was certain.

"What do they all mean?" asked Mr. Treby, turning for enlightenment to the German, who had been summoned by Zyl to speak the decisive word. But Walt pressed before him. He had brought the Englishman home. He had taken to Jack. Algarkirke had repeated to him many more details about the fire, which he had gathered from Mr. Treby's conversation in the night. He knew now that poor little Jack had been barely rescued from the flames.

During the schoolmaster's three days' sojourn at Jaarsveldt Walt had been picking up English as diligently as the players on old Tom Tiddler's ground are reported to pick up gold and silver.

He pointed to the door of the *slaap-kamé* where Jack was lying, and asserted most energetically: "Your boy there very bad boy. We make a full stop of him. All right. You put him in there," he added, pointing to Mr. Treby's waggon, which was drawn up outside the gate. "Wohl—" Alas! his English was exhausted; he rubbed his head, imitated the jog-trot of the oxen, and the jolting and shaking of the lumbering waggon. Dead set at last for want of a word, which Otto could not or would not supply, he snatched the stick from his brother's hand, and drew the outline of a coffin-lid upon the clayey floor. It was but a lame attempt at speaking English, yet for all that he had made his meaning forcible and plain. "Take him away?" he asked, making an impressive pause, then by way of answer to his own in-

quiry, he pointed to his mother and her coloured maids, as if he were counting them on his fingers. Mr. Treby was almost deafened by the babel of tongues around him, whilst Otto fairly laughed when Walt interpreted this clamour of female tongues as "One big no."

Mr. Treby brushed a tear-drop from his eye and shook hands all round. So it was settled that Jack must be left behind. His father's heart was touched by the rough kindness of his Dutch neighbours.

The loft over the end of the house to the farm-yard happened just now to be empty. Van Immerseel kept his wool there. He had sold it all out, so that the loft would not be wanted until the next sheep-shearing; and Walt suggested that Mr. Treby's things would be quite safe in there until his return. For of course he must unload his waggon before he could let it to his neighbour at Scarsdorp. He had raked out a few things from the ashes the day before—pieces of iron, hooks, and hinges; the lump of lead into which his bullets had melted; and more than all, the blackened and mis-shapen contents of his purse. Would his money pass? He could hardly tell. There were two sovereigns sticking together, and the smaller silver pieces had run into a shapeless lump; but the half-crowns, being more solid, were less injured.

Zyl came to help him to unload, whilst Sannie sat at the foot of the wooden ladder watching their proceedings. There was no time to be lost, for Mr. Treby knew that his thirteen oxen would be longer on the

road than when he had fourteen, and he wanted to leave everything as straight as he could for Seco and Tottie. But the thought of parting from his little Jack weighed heavily on his heart, for he could not tell how long he should be gone. Vickel, in her joy at having her master back again, insisted on perching on his shoulder, and pecking from his hand, much to Zyl's amusement.

Whilst they were still busy packing in the loft, a messenger arrived from Scarsdorp with the final order for Mr. Treby. He must be ready with his waggon in the morning, when the bearer of the message would return with him.

"That is a fine bird of yours, master," laughed the man, as Vickel saluted him with her loudest scream, "and a valuable one. Nothing so quick as an ostrich to detect a stranger's presence. Why, she will be worth twenty pounds of anybody's money when she begins to lay. A brood of chicks like herself will prove a little fortune. They would be worth ten pounds each as soon as they are out of the shell."

"You think so?" cried Mr. Treby, brightening. "I do not know much about ostrich management. I brought this one up to be a guard about the place. She has cost me nothing, for she lives on the wild rosemary and scrubby grass that the sheep won't eat. If it had not been for my boy, I believe I should have sold her for a very small sum in my strait."

"Sell her," exclaimed the messenger, "with ostrich
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feathers selling at £23 the pound, and she just coming into profit! No, no."

Mr. Treby stroked the fond bird's satin breast as he made her dismount. Could it indeed be true? He thought of the summer morning when one of the wild-looking Kafirs, who were helping him to reap his little wheat-field, had found the ostrich's nest, and had given one of the chicks to Jack for a pet and plaything. Well, he intent upon his sheep had not thought much about her value certainly. He thanked the man for his advice, feeling as if all unawares he had put his foot on the first step of the ascending ladder of fortune.

"That is news for Jack," he thought, casting a critical glance over his tall favourite, who was now enjoying herself picking a bone like a dog. The bird had wonderfully improved. It was Genderen's bowl of barley night and morning which had wrought the change, but Mr. Treby knew nothing about that. He concluded Vickel got her own living here as she did at home, browsing on the sandy veldt, or he would not have left her at Jaarsveldt.

"Come, Jack," he said, when he told his boy of his intended departure. "Your feathered queen is to make our fortune, according to this man's talk. So it may be a providential thing this illness of yours. It is forcing me to leave you behind, and I should not wonder if you learn a deal about ostrich management from the Immerseels by the time I come back. They

say we might have cut Vickel's feathers this very summer, if they had not been scorched."

It was worth something to bring the sparkle of happiness into the boy's sunken eyes, as he listened to the comforting assurance that to part with Vickel would be like selling the goose which laid the golden eggs.

"I tell you what, Jack," continued his father; "when we come back from Kimberley, we must buy her a mate of Van Immerseel. They might pay better than the sheep."

Whilst Mr. Treby was thus endeavouring to soothe and cheer the feverish child, he heard an unusual bustle, and looking out of the window, saw three horsemen fully armed, and covered with the summer dust, ride in at the gate. Their strong young horses were flecked with foam, as if they had been travelling fast and far. Van Immersel's hand was on the bridle of the foremost of the three, an aged Boer, with hair like snow and a frame of iron. They were talking eagerly.

Out ran Mr. Treby, expecting to hear of some fresh outrage that would cap his own, but the few words which caught his ear convinced him that the firing of his lonely homestead was the sole subject of their earnest discussion.

"Ah! here he comes," exclaimed the old man, who could speak English fairly well. "Ik Van Niepert," he continued, stretching out a hand to Mr. Treby that was the masculine counterpart of Tante Milligen's own.

The Englishman felt as if his fingers would be crushed in the hearty hand-grip which ensued.

“The scare has spread, as these Kafir scares always do, like wildfire. It reached us last night. Farmhouse in flames—Jaarsveldt for a certainty, as we all thought. So, as I have been telling my son-in-law here” (and the big hand came down with a slap on Van Immerseel’s shoulder which would have made Mr. Treby reel), “with that fear in our heads, it was not long before the rifles were loaded and the horses saddled, and on we’ve pushed; and I could have sworn we heard the thud of the bullets as we drew near. Thought you were having to fight off the black beggars, as I’ve done many a time when Milligen was a lass at home.”

Van Niepert’s sons, two powerful-looking men, with slow tongues and stolid countenances, confirmed their father’s words with an assenting grunt, as they dismounted, leaned their saddles against the wall of the house, and turned their horses loose in the yard.

Out ran the children to welcome their grandfather and uncles, with noisy joy, whilst Mr. Treby was explaining the real facts of the case as briefly and clearly as he could. He had heard of Van Niepert as a leading man among the Boers, whose word had had great weight in the conferences between these old Dutch settlers and the British Government, and that he had tried to maintain the friendly relations between them.

IX.

HOW TANTE MILLIGEN MANAGED.

HOW to house so many guests in Jaarsveldt was the question that was troubling Tante Milligen's hospitable mind. Walt and his brother were at once relegated to the threshing-floor in the great barn, where a bed of clean straw was prepared in haste. Walt rolled up his coat without more ado, and lay down, as he had done many a night after a late dancee when the house was full. But the spare slaap-kamé must be prepared for Van Niepert, who was treated with great respect by his daughter's family. One uncle would keep watch with the shepherd until daybreak, when his brother would exchange with him; therefore Walt's vacant bed would serve for both. But what to do with the little English boy—that was Tante Milligen's difficulty. She thought of sending him in Walt's arms to the shepherd's hut, whose bed would, of course, be unoccupied. "And give me the fever," said Otto with a glooming brow, for he had just overheard Van Niepert recommending his son-in-law to get rid of that German fellow. He

might be bully uppermost, but he was certain he was coward underneath. "Get this Englishman to mind your sheep," he added. "He would have been a match for those black rascals single-handed if he had not been frightened off by his boy's danger. You can make it better worth his while than going to dig for diamonds. You say this is just another Kafir scare; but what safeguard have you that it won't be repeated? Answer me that."

Mr. Treby was quick to notice the change in Otto's manner towards him; and getting a hint about the sleeping difficulty, cut it through by proposing to make a bed for Jack in the wool-loft, where he intended to pass the night himself.

To Jack the exchange was delightful, for the loft was cool and still. Mr. Treby left the upper half of the door wide open. The silvery radiance of the African moon fell full upon the slanting roof, and the refreshing night breeze seemed like new life to the weary child after the choking heat of "that horrid oven."

All the heterogeneous remains of Mr. Treby's belongings were piled in order on the sloping side. Jack's little truckle-bed was placed where the wall was highest, and by it stood the great black travelling-chest Mr. Treby had rescued from the fire. He was kneeling down examining its contents in the moonlight.

"This was your mother's chest, my boy," he said, "and when I lost her I locked up everything in it

that had been her own—sacred treasures to me, that nothing in the world could ever replace. I hurled this out of the burning house first of all; but I little thought this would be really all I should save. She would never have forgiven me if I had let my feelings stand in the way of your good. You are a part of her, my boy; and I am looking them over now to find presents for this hospitable Dutchwoman and her maids. Just an acknowledgment of their kindness to you, my dear, before I leave you altogether to their care."

With a feeling of yearning sadness that winged his thoughts beyond this visible world, Jack leaned his head upon his hand and watched his father unfold the faded dresses. He saw him lay aside some treasured keepsake with a bitter sigh, or press it to his lips in fond remembrance. At last the selection was made.

Some yards of Buckinghamshire lace and an ivory fan were laid aside for Tante Milligen; a leathern reticule, some English photographs of churches, one or two little boxes of Tunbridge ware, for her children. For the coloured maids more useful articles were desirable—a flowered handkerchief, a pompadour dress, a bow of scarlet satin, an apron embroidered with crewels.

"You will not forget the poor Black Antelope, father," whispered Jack softly. "I have not seen her for days; but she was always kind."

"They think she is skulking about, afraid to show herself because of her master's anger; but I will leave this handkerchief for her if she comes back," said Mr. Treby shaking out a Scotch plaid-scarf, which Jack laid carefully under his pillow, reiterating his belief in the black girl's innocence.

"I wish," returned his father, "I was as sure about that young Englishman. I am afraid he has cheated me out of ten shillings I could ill spare; for the man who drove him over to the next farm must have returned by this time, and I can hear nothing of the promised coat. Whether it was misfortune or misconduct shipped him off here in such a hurry, we cannot say. It is the worst of a colonist's life: your heart warms at the sight of a fellow-countryman, and then you find him out to be a worthless scamp. Well, it teaches me to appreciate this worthy old Boer. He struck so hard, Jack, because the flask was not his own. What would become of us now if there was no one we could trust? But there is that straight-forward honesty about him that he will take all the more care of my things because I am a stranger; and that is saying a great deal."

Then Mr. Treby took a great hammer and some nails which he had borrowed, and after he had locked the chest, he nailed down the lid to make it additionally safe.

Everything at last was ready for his departure. Whilst Jack slept the first real sleep since the fever

had seized him, his father took the proffered pipe from Genderen's hand, and sat down on the bench in the garden where the Boers were smoking. He turned to Van Niepert, for he had something yet to say. He was thinking what would become of Jack if he were overtaken by any of the perils which menace a traveller in these wild regions. His thoughts were all for his boy.

The Dutchman puffed a great cloud of smoke into the air as he talked of what might be. Then Van Niepert's big hand descended with a thud. "Look yonder, man, across the veldt. Can't either of us see the kopjee (hill) that divides your land from Walt's. But that is there; and the boy's here. Walt must keep them both till the boy is of age to manage his own. Let your mind be easy. There will be the rent laid by year after year—a good round sum to start him with by that time."

"Ik is Walt Immerseel," said his neighbour, sealing the promise the old man's words conveyed with a hearty hand-grip Mr. Treby never forgot.

"I am Walt Immerseel," translated the grandfather. "There, man, is not that enough?"

"Jah, Jah!" muttered the stolid brothers.

"Strike hands on that. Did an Immerseel ever run back?"

Jack's father indeed appreciated to the full that steady persistency that lies at the root of the Dutch character, the source of their wonderful patience and

unwearying industry, and also of their dogged obstinacy, making it harder to turn a Dutch Boer aside than the proverbial donkey.

"Never despair," continued old Niepert, puffing away huge volumes of smoke between every sentence, "while you've your hands and your acres. 'Amsterdam was built upon a herring-bone.' You've more than that to work upon."

Never did the good old Dutch proverb teach its lesson to more attentive ears. Yes, in the dreary swamp where the Dutchman first drew breath the visit of the herring-shoal was the only source of gain.

Mr. Treby felt how good it is to look back at these great works, which patient perseverance has already accomplished in this world of ours, when our own small corner is devastated. It helped him to brace his own energies to the task before him.

But he did not repeat to Jack a single word of all this conversation, for he wanted to cheer him. So he turned away from the clouds which threatened him, and looked only at the brighter side. He spoke of Vickel.

"If she should lay before I come back, you must take the greatest care of her eggs. If they are worth five pounds a-piece, Jack, you will be a rich man some of these days."

With his father's arm around him and his father's voice still murmuring in his ears, Jack fell once more into that peaceful, health-restoring sleep which gladdened his father's heart more than anything else.

But when he awakened from it, that father had departed. The waggon had started at daybreak ; Mr. Treby was gone.

Little Sannie was singing on the *steop*, as the front of the house was called. Bright and busy life was around him everywhere, but he had no share in it. He lay on his face, so that no one should see the tears that would gather in his eyes, he felt so unutterably lonely.

Zyl was the first to come to him. Oh, if they could only talk ; but as this pleasure was out of their power, the Dutch boy sat swinging on the lower half of the door, whistling compassionately. The English-made rakes and hoes and all the other odd pieces of iron-work which Mr. Treby had left behind him, attracted his attention. Whilst he examined them, Jack's red eyes were roving the world without. Where was his father ? Which way did he go ? Between those huge distorted masses of rock which had been hitherto like a brown blot on Jack's horizon ? He saw them now with other eyes—giant forms of rainbow-tinted crystal, with smooth bands of gray and red overlying each other ; and at their feet the huge red plain that to Jack was home. But here at Jaarsveldt the more abundant water had partly covered the karroo with a coat of green. In the very crevices of the loosely-built stone walls, dark green leaves peeped forth to the rising sunshine ; and on the tumble-down sod walls by the Kafir huts, luxurious

chickweed was tangled with the glistening leaves of the ice-plant. A Kafir maid at her early dairy-work was singing a low-voiced chant in sleepy tones, which more nearly resembled the hum of the honey-laden bee than any other sound; whilst the growing sunlight tinted all around with the golden hue of the ripened corn.

When Zyl perceived that Jack was awake, he came into the loft, and taking out of his pocket a kind of pop-gun he had been making, he showed it to him. A sort of pantomime sufficed to explain its working. It made Jack laugh to see how easily Zyl shot off a volley of peas at the opposite wall. It was all the better for Jack, now the three days with the books were exchanged for three weeks of wild liberty, in which the young Boers delighted. They were checkered with spells of real work in the garden and with the men. But these only increased Zyl's happiness, who was longing for the time when Jack could share it with him. He stowed the pop-gun away under Jack's pillow with a smile, and gathering up his spent ammunition, poured it into the thin white hand that was softly pressing his own.

“All right,” cried Zyl, imitating his brother; and the brief sentence Otto had taught them became a sort of watchword between the two boys.

Zyl slid down the ladder with a tremendous boohoo, and took himself off to the sheep-kraals.

But Jack was not forgotten by the rest of the

family. Tante Milligen herself ascended the ladder, puffing and perspiring, for her exceeding stoutness rendered the ascent a matter of difficulty. She dropped down on the foot of Jack's bed, and regarded him anxiously. After feeling his head and his hands, and even pushing a finger into his mouth (Jack manfully resisted the temptation to bite it), she gave a satisfied smile, and departed in her turn, for she heard the rumble of cart-wheels entering the gate.

The ugly old Hottentot brought him his breakfast, and with it the light-gray overcoat Mr. Algarkirke had promised to send. It was tied round with a bit of string, and a card was dangling to it, on which was printed, "Sandford Algarkirke," in tiny letters. "For Mr. Treby" was written in pencil, just above the printed name.

Oh, how pleased Jack felt to see it; but what a pity his father was gone. As soon as he was left alone, he sat up and untied the string. He took off the card and examined the minute copperplate. He had no idea it was an English gentleman's visiting card, for he had never seen or heard of such a thing in his life. He thought he would put it in the breast-pocket of the coat, to take care of it, to show his father; but he found there was a slit in the bottom of the pocket, so he tied it up in the clean poeket-handkerchief his father had found for him in his mother's chest. Then Jack thought he would hang up the coat on a nail which he saw at the other end

of the loft. He tried to put his feet to the ground ; but he was so weakened by the fever that his head swam round, and for a few minutes he could hardly tell where he was.

“ Oh dear, oh dear ! What shall I do ? ” he moaned. “ I do want Tottie.”

If his Dutch friends heard him, they did not understand the piteous cry ; but Vickel, lying on her breast in the sand, with her head touching the ground, recognized the dear familiar voice she had been missing. With a bound and a scream she struck upon the door Tante Milligen had so carefully closed, and burst it open. The wooden latch flew off, and stretching her long neck into the loft, she discovered her beloved Jack half-buried in the coat. Vickel snatched at the heap of gray with beak and claw, and pulling it off Jack’s face, she looked at him with her large, luminous, human-like eyes welling over with love behind their long dark lashes. Up came the Hottentot herdsman and drove her away. But she had found out her master’s retreat, and she watched over him night and day. There was no fear of Vickel straying from Jaarsveldt whilst Jack was in the loft. Ostriches are often called stupid, because they hide their heads under their wings at the approach of danger ; but this is really a sign of their great intelligence. Their strong and powerful limbs can resist the attack of a buffalo, whilst a slight blow on their graceful, tender heads kills them in a moment. They

know this, and so they use their short wing, with its splendid curling feathers, as a shield.

Of course Vickel's last escapade was duly reported at head-quarters, and an ill-looking Kafir, who had been wounded in the fight in which she had been taken prisoner by the Boers, was told off to watch the sick child.

Jack dreamed of her scarred face, and wakened in a fright, believing she was about to cut off his ears. But in spite of these drawbacks, his strength was slowly returning. Genderen was permitted to bring him grapes, and feed him with huge spoonfuls of a coarse but strengthening jelly, not many removes from liquid glue.

Before Van Niepert departed he too mounted the wooden ladder about half-way, until his head was level with the door in the gable. Rejoicing in a veritable tribe of children and grandchildren, he had had much experience, and his dictum was usually received as final. He pronounced Jack out of all danger, and bade him cheer up, for he would soon be on his feet again.

Jack started up in horror for fear he should be once more consigned to the oven-like *slaap-kamé* when the old grandfather had departed. Van Niepert had spoken to him in English, and this emboldened Jack to prefer a very earnest petition that he might be permitted to keep his little bed in the loft. It was curing him, he urged ; he had been getting better ever since he had been there.

With a hearty laugh at English tastes, Van Niepert persuaded his daughter to let the little fellow have his way. Tante Milligen was the more willing to indulge him because, like a thrifty housewife, she had been secretly chagrined at being obliged to put a strange boy in her best bed.

Walt was saddling his grandfather's horse ; Van Immerseel was dutifully receiving a little parting advice ; the whole family were gathered on the stoop to watch the departure, when the eldest of the stolid uncles slowly mounted Jack's ladder, and taking out a leathern bag, deliberately looked over its contents, selecting an English sixpence.

Jack wondered what was coming, when he saw it spinning round and round between the thumb and finger of the younger Niepert's big hand.

This was done to attract Jack's attention. When the Boer was satisfied the English boy was looking at him, he tossed the sixpence towards him with so good an aim, it alighted in Jack's palm.

X.

THE BANK-NOTE.

“SLOW and steady” was assuredly the Boer’s motto. The formal leave-takings, the blessings and the charges delivered by Van Niepert to every member of his daughter’s family before he set a foot in the stirrup, took up so much time that Jaek grew tired of being alone. His pop-gun was his first resouree, but his ammunition was soon exhausted, and Zyl did not appear to gather up the scattered peas; so he waited until the searred Kafir put in an appearance with his bowl of milk. Not understanding what it was he wanted, she brought him his father’s coat. As she held it out to him, Jaek saw for the first time that Vickel had torn the lining.

He took it from her hand in much dismay, wondering whether he were man enough to mend it. As he turned it over, a letter fell out from between the cloth and the lining. It had never been opened; but it must have been shaking about in the inside of the coat a long while, for the edges of the envelope were worn through and let the contents fall out.

The letter was addressed to the “Rev. Astley Bourke,” and that was all. Jack unfolded the note, and found a flimsy piece of paper folded in it, on which was printed, “Bank of England.”

“Can this be a bank-note?” thought Jack, for he had seen one when his father sold his wool. He felt now he was making a grand discovery, and read the note very carefully.

“The Honourable Mrs. Featherstone presents her compliments to the Rev. Astley Bourke, and in answer to his application encloses a bank-note for £50.

“HAWKSWOOD HALL, NOTTINGHAM.”

Of course it was the word Nottingham caught Jack’s eye, for it made him think of his grandfather. But he did not consider it wise to let the Kafir see the bank-note, so he slipped it under his pillow until he was left alone. But unfortunately Jack’s precaution failed, for the Kafir would not have known what it was if she had seen it, but Otto did; and just as Jack had taken out the note and spread it before him on the sheet to examine it more thoroughly, Tante Milligen, happening to meet Otto, sent him to set Jack’s mind at ease.

Walt had gone with his grandfather part of the way, so the German was once again the only English-speaking individual on the farm.

As he poked his way into the loft to deliver Tante



VICKIE AND HER MASTER.



Milligen's message, he caught sight of the note, and watched Jack slip it out of sight. He said nothing, but "Bank of England," "fifty pounds," rang in his head for days.

The German did not stay long. When Jack found himself alone once more, he packed up his treasure very carefully, knotting it in the handkerchief with Mr. Algarkirke's card and the sixpence the younger Niepert had given to him.

"I must keep it very carefully till father comes back," he thought. "I wonder whom it belongs to? Fifty pounds is such a lot of money; wouldn't father be glad if it were his?" Then he turned over and tried to sleep; but the responsibility of so large a sum of money under his pillow would not let him rest.

The very wind seemed singing "the Rev. Astley Bourke." At last he sat upright, and once more taking out his treasure, looked for the date. He could read it clearly in the brilliant moonlight, and counting the intervening months on his fingers, satisfied himself that the letter was written nearly two years ago.

"How odd that Mr. Algarkirke never found it," reflected Jack, "for it must have been in the lining of the coat all the while he had it. I wonder where he is now. Father did not altogether like him; but he said he could trust Van Immersccl, for he took such care of everything in the waggon, all the more because father was a stranger to him, and I must do the same."

After Jack had cleared up his mind and decided what he ought to do in the matter, sleep became possible once more. He dreamed of running over the sea with the bank-note in his hand, to ask his grandfather if the Rev. Astley Bourke lived at Nottingham.

The next day Jack was dressed by the Kafir in the grotesque garments the Black Antelope had found for him. Then she got him on her back and carried him down the ladder into the sit-kamé, and laid him down on Sannie's sheep-skin. He had found a bit of string in the loft, and tied his treasures round his neck under the blouse.

Everybody came and looked at him, and spoke encouragingly in Dutch. But he had nothing to do but to count the plum-stones in the floor and the beams in the ceiling, for the other children were sent out of the way to keep him quiet; but this did not last long. Little Sannie was the first to make her way to him. She came waddling in like a fat little duck, with both hands full of sweeties, which she wanted him to share.

The next morning Zyl stood at the foot of the ladder with a look of business about him, waiting for Jack's appearance. Jack was looking much better and feeling stronger. He found he could dispense with the old Kafir's services, and walked down the ladder himself.

Having at last got hold of Jack's hand, Zyl led him off in triumph to the three-cornered seat in his own

little garden. The grassy thatch on the old umbrella had been well watered, thus adding a refreshing coolness to the quiet nook. A pile of newly-cut sods were prepared for a footstool, and a heap of juicy oranges for their mutual enjoyment.

A few such days brought back the colour to Jack's cheek, and the sparkle of returning health to his hollow eyes. Then Zyl and Genderen laid their heads together and evolved a grand scheme.

A little hand-carriage was constructed with Walt's help, very much resembling a wash-trough on wheels. A pillow and an old cloak of Tante Milligen's were placed in it, before Jack was asked if he would like a drive.

Zyl was horse and Sannie driver, whilst Genderen walked sedately by its side with a branch of a milk-bush in her hand, flicking away the flies with its long waxen leaves.

“Ah! neu yah trek!” shouted Zyl, and away they went towards the sheep-kraals.

Now and then they stopped to rest, when Sannie played in the waving tainbouki grass, and gathered bunches of the yellow bitto flower and bright bluebell; and Genderen pointed to the tiny black insects with red stripes which made that bunch of yellow flowers their mimie city. Then Zyl discovered a veritable ant-palace, out of which the valiant inhabitants were marching to make war on their encroaching neighbours. So eager was he to watch the pitched

battle which ensued, that he approached too near the insect squadron, and got a sting for his temerity. How odd it seemed not to be able to talk in the same language to each other. Genderen, in her slow, quiet fashion, was trying to teach Jack the Dutch names of the different things they passed, and to repeat his English ones. Their mutual mistakes called forth such bursts of laughter that there was no lack of fun amongst them. That was obviously intelligible all round. Jack had recourse to pantomime, in which he was growing very expert, imitating what he wanted to describe just as children do in the game of "dumb actions."

Then Zyl once more began his shout of "Ah ! neu yah trek !" and the little cavalcade again set forward, until they came in sight of Otto's hut and the vast multitude of sheep dotting the red karroo.

As they drew nearer, the shepherd's dogs came leaping and bounding towards them with short, joyous barks of welcome.

Zyl was for harnessing them to Jack's car, and rushed off to borrow a rope of Otto. But Genderen shook her head, and reminded him they were to rest in the shepherd's hut, where a basket of fruit and roaster-cakes would be waiting for them.

Otto himself came trotting up on his shaggy pony. He had locked the door of his hut when he left it in the morning; but the basket Genderen expected to find had been duly left on the step by one of the

Kafir boys. The German pressed them to enter, and lifted Jack out of his carriage.

The hut was built of wattle and clay, with a fireplace and one window. Jack was eager to go in, for he thought perhaps his father could build them such another; it could not cost anything so much as their house which was burned down.

Genderen began to unpack the basket, and spread its contents on Otto's little table. As a matter of course, he was invited to take his share. But to find seats for so large a party was more than he knew how to manage, seeing he could boast of but one chair, and that he offered to Genderen. He had no bedstead, but a sort of hammock swung across the end of the hut. He began to clear the top of his box, which usually served him as a side-table.

Jack suddenly stepped forward, for there lay his lost knife. "Please, Mr. Otto," he began.

But the German turned to him with a frown. "I'll have no meddling with my things," he answered in a threatening tone.

Jack was silent; he saw it was useless to remonstrate, for the German would give his own version to Van Immerseel. "And, I am sure," thought Jack, "a man who would take my knife would not be above telling a lie; and I could not explain to anybody it was mine any more than I could about the poor Black Antelope."

Still Jack had one more question he wanted to

ask the shepherd, so he said quickly, "We are not going to meddle with any of your things, Mr. Otto," with an emphasis on the "your" that made the German bristle all over like a porcupine setting up its quills. But he was a little disarmed when Jack continued undismayed, "But please, Mr. Otto, can you tell me when the schoolmaster will come again?"

This was a vital question for Jack, and he waited breathlessly for the answer. But Otto either could not or would not tell him.

After a while Zyl set up his unearthly shout of, "Ah! neu yah trek!" and although Otto flatly refused to let his dogs be transferred into post-horses, the return journey was as blithe as the outgoing.

Of course, the dogs obeyed their master's whistle, and accompanied him until they had a good view of the sheep. Perceiving that their customary charges were all right, and that nothing particular was required of them, they rushed back to the children with one accord, feeling themselves in duty bound to see their young friends well on their homeward way. Up they came, with their curly ears well back and their bushy tails wagging with delight. Their eyes were bright with the pleasure of stolen liberty, as they bounded round the children, saying as plainly as dogs always can to those who try to understand them, "We know we shall catch it if we are caught, but we'll risk it just this once for you, you dears."

Then hands were licked and shaggy heads were

fondled, and hairy and rosy lips exchanged their mutual kisses, Jack at last becoming emboldened to take his share in this overflow of caressing love.

Suddenly the oldest of these curly guards laid his keen head to the ground, and catching the echo of a far-off whistle, gave a look to his companions. Away they flew, raising a cloud of sand behind them, and leaving the children breathless with laughter.

The next day they made an excursion in an opposite direction, towards the rocks. All thought of danger from the free Kafirs was now set at rest.

“It was proved the thieves had come from civilized, not from savage life. More shame to them!” thought Jack. “If I had only been big enough to shoulder a rifle behind father, we should have been a match for them. Next time we’ll see.”

Away he walked, resolved to try his strength and make Sannie ride. By dint of persistency he carried his point, but was glad to compromise the matter and make frequent exchanges, which Genderen approved, observing, “Das is wohl” (that is well), as she felt proud of the success of their experiment, for Jack was getting well now as fast as he could.

They ate their fruit and cakes in what the Dutch children called a “kloof”—that is, a narrow cleft in the nearest mass of rock, down which in time of rain a dashing cataract thundered, fed by a mountain stream. But the burning sunshine of that African summer had dried up the fall to a few trickling drops.

A deep indented line of whitening sand divided the bottom of the valley. High overhead the precipitous rocks arose like the walls of a giant stronghold ; and the tiny water-drops which oozed so slowly from their fractured sides fell with a musical sound on the smooth, flat stones at their feet—stones which had been polished to their present smoothness by the drip of ages. In this cool retreat, beneath the grateful shadow of the rocks, there grew a quivering tree. There was no one to tell Jack its nature or its name, but he gazed upon it in an ecstasy of delight and wonder. Lower down the bank of the dried-up stream a clump of young mimosas gave shelter to a covey of wild guinea-fowl.

As the children advanced, running and shouting to each other in their glee, the shy and timid guinea-chicks were frightened, and rising from the flat-crowned bushes, took their flight to the safer shelter of the rocks.

Off went Genderen and Zyl on the quest for eggs, creeping on their hands and knees where the tangle of underwood would have barred their progress. To such bird-nesting Jack had been a stranger ; but after Genderen had shown him the first nest she had discovered, with its circle of dark pointed eggs, he comprehended their object and joined in the eager pursuit. Sannie was left to enjoy a nap in the little carriage, which they had drawn up beneath the shadow of the quivering tree.

Again and again Jack put his hand to his breast to be sure that weighty responsibility, the Bank of England note, was safe in his handkerchief. He was growing tired with the scrambling and the scratches, so he went back to the sleeping Sannie, and gathering a handful of rushes which grew upon the margin of the dried-up stream, plaited them into a small flat basket, just big enough to hold his treasure. He sewed the top together with a long and flexible rush, so that no one could catch a glimpse of even the white handkerchief, in which the letter and its important contents were wrapped up. Then he tied it round his neck once more, and satisfied at last that he had made it really safe, lay down by Sannie to rest. He had no idea that the little snoring bundle had slept with one eye open, and was very curious as to his proceedings, until she stretched out both her fat baby hands and pulled his shirt, inquiring with an infantine lisp that was almost irresistible to Jack, "Was is das?"

He took her on his knee, and with the remains of the rushes wove her a basket for her very own.

In that cool retreat the summer hours flew swiftly by, and the children never thought of returning; for Genderen had found a nest of tiny guinca-chicks, and Zyl had lined the empty luncheon-basket with soft dry grass to receive them. Genderen placed them in it with a careful hand, delighted with the prospect of carrying home so excellent a find.

As she extricated herself from the thicket, she saw a little bit of a scarlet blanket clinging to a mimosa leaf. A sudden thought struck her. She turned back, parted the branches, and looked eagerly between them. She saw a heap of gathered grass, crushed and pressed, as if it had been the sleeping-place of some wild animal. Genderen brushed her hand across her eyes, and stooping down, picked up a brass-headed pin she herself had given to the poor Black Antelope.

Here, then, was her retreat. Could she be hiding here still?

"No; she was on her way to her own country," persisted Zyl; "but they could not leave the kloof without a search."

Up and down the dried-up bed of the watercourse, on to every accessible ledge to be discovered on its rocky sides, went Zyl, prodding with a broken branch from the quivering tree into every hole and crevice, where it was possible and even where it was not possible for their hare-like friend to hide; but all in vain. The cold, hard rocks only echoed back the much-loved name Zyl persisted in shouting at the very top of his voice.

"It is of no use," said Genderen sorrowfully. "When we get home father will send the men with the dogs, and perhaps they will hurt her."

"They must bring me back with them," interposed Zyl, "to show them where she slept. Mind you don't describe it so that they can find it without me, Gen;

and if they flog her, they will have to flog me first, that's all."

Having reached this decision, they ran across to Jack, who recognized the bit of scarlet blanket and the brass pin in a minute. He had felt too weak to take part in the search, but shared their grief at its failure. Zyl pointed out one source of comfort: poor Blackie would not starve with guinea-fowls' eggs to suck and the pure rock-water to drink. This was their consolation.

Zyl insisted upon Jack riding home, although Jack was sure Sannie could not walk so far; but there were the eggs to be conveyed, and Sannie might break them. Zyl was dogged, so Jack gave in and let Zyl tuck him up in his carriage. Then the Dutch boy brought an armful of grass, which he kneaded into a sort of nest on Jack's lap, and in this the eggs were piled. Genderen placed her precious basket of living chicks in his right hand, for she had a heavier task to perform in carrying Sannie.

Under such circumstances, their progress was of the slowest; and before they had progressed half a mile, they encountered Otto, who had come in search of them.

He had gone up to the house by chance, and finding Tante Milligen in a state of great anxiety because the children had not returned, he volunteered to ride round and look for them. He took up Genderen behind him and Sannie before him; but he left the

boys to their own devices, knowing well that no power on earth could make Zyl quicken his pace and risk his eggs.

Sannie was delighted to find herself on the neck of Otto's horse, with his arm round her waist, holding her safe and fast. So she chattered on in her innocent way, half to herself and half to him. He was thinking more of Genderen's heavy sighs (for he knew she was dreading her mother's anger) than of Sannie's prattle, until she asked him to give her letters and paper to put in her basket like those Jack Treby kept in his. Then he lent a very earnest ear, asking her many questions.

XI.

OTTO THE SHEPHERD.

ZYL drove home his load in safety, but he thought it prudent to stop at one of the Kafirs' huts. Here he left Genderen's chicks in charge, and sent up his glorious find of eggs to the farm-house. Then he took fast hold of Jack's hand, and led him round by the back of the farm-buildings until they reached the foot of the ladder leading to the wool-loft. Jaek did not often now resist his good-natured but self-willed friend. He had taken a leaf from Genderen's tactics, so they got on together admirably. Zyl insisted upon undressing him and putting him to bed. Jack could guess the reason why. Zyl meant to take the whole of the blame and its consequences upon his own shoulders.

Jack looked round the sloping roof and white-washed wall of his loft, with a sort of home-feeling he had never experienced before at Jaarsveldt, when it suddenly struck him it was looking more untidy than usual. Yes, he was certain all the things his father had packed up so neatly under the slope of the roof

had been pulled about. Who could have done it? The loft had not been cleaned, for the floor was littered all over. He was too hungry to sleep and too anxious to know what sort of reception Zyl had met with, to rest anywhere. Then he heard a noise as of horses' feet, and jumping up in bed saw the "oom" himself, on his great black horse, with Zyl behind him, and Walt on his fastest hunter at his side, with all the dogs and four or five of the Hottentots, starting for the rocks —in search of the poor Black Antelope, he could not doubt. Jack's heart ached for her; and he lay down and covered his face, thinking what it must be to wander forlorn and homeless in these wilds.

In a little while the ugly Kafir brought him a calabash of ox-tail soup, and after that he sank into the sound sleep of healthy childhood. Nothing less than two awkward hands pulling at the collar of his shirt would have wakened him that night. But there they were. He felt the knuckles pressing on his throat, and almost thought it was a dream. He put up his own to push them away, and took hold of real hands —the rough, strong hands of a man clutching at his treasure. He was wide awake in an instant, fighting them off. Something was over his eyes. He struggled hard, and freed himself for a moment. He felt a man's hot breath upon his cheek, and screamed out with all his might as he recognized the face of the German shepherd.

Would anybody come to his help? Could he even

make himself heard in the dead of night? He remembered Van Immerseel and his sons were away. Yes, their absence had given Otto his opportunity. Jack saw it all, and grew cold with fear as he felt himself powerless in Otto's grasp. Then came the thought, "God sees, and he is ever more ready to help than we to ask." But thought itself soon became impossible, for Otto was cramming the corner of the pillow into his mouth to stifle his cries. Jack tried hard to throw himself on his face. Somehow he managed to get the precious letter under him, and not all Otto's blows or low-voiced menaces could make him stir from this position.

Vickel, who was roosting, as usual, at the foot of Jack's ladder, had lifted a sleepy head when Otto passed her; but as she was now familiar with every one about the farm, she let him go up the ladder unmolested.

Jack's scream aroused her vigilance, and two bright eyes were watching every movement; for Vickel was quite tall enough, when she drew herself to her full height, to peep in at the door of the loft, which Otto had left wide open to gain light enough for his search. She could not see Jack, who had rolled himself in the bed-clothes, until Otto lifted him by main force from the pillow to which he still clung. Then Vickel sprang upon the ladder with a cry of mingled love and rage, and struck the intruder so fierce a blow with her closed beak that it sent him headlong on the floor. Before

he had time to recover his feet she seized him by the leg with beak and claw, and dragged him out of the loft.

“Call her off! call her off! or she’ll kill me,” roared Otto as she once more lifted her formidable talon, ready to gore his flesh from the bones, when Jack, as white as ashes, and with scarcely voice enough to make himself heard, called, “Vic, Vic, Vic!” just as he had called her at feeding-time all her life. He snatched up some of the peas which were lying by his pop-gun and flung them towards her. With the beautiful docility of an ostrich, she turned and dropped her foe. The angry eyes grew eloquent with love, and the beak that was dealing death to Otto was stooped obediently to peck the peas in Jack’s trembling hand. He leaned against her faithful breast, for the loft swam round, and he thought he must have fallen. But with the comprehension love alone can lend, Vickel spread her feathery shield above his head, and drawing him to her, brooded over him as a hen broods over her chicks.

Jack peeped between the soft gray plumes of her sheltering wings, for he heard Otto groan, and now he saw him, a dark heap at the foot of the ladder. He had been stunned by his fall; but he soon began to move and mutter threats of vengeance on Jack and his ostrich.

“It was your own fault, Mr. Otto,” said Jack firmly. “What did you come here for to pull me out of bed

in the middle of the night? Vickel would have killed you if I had not stopped her. You know that as well as I do."

The German got up stiffly. "You made me cross," he grumbled. "You snored like a pig, and you would not answer me. I came to fetch that bank-note. It is not safe for a child like you to carry so much money about with you. Come, hand it down, or you'll be robbed and murdered some of these days with all those coloured fellows about. If I have given you a fright, it was to show you your danger."

"Oh indeed, Mr. Otto," retorted Jack with a laugh. "I have no need to be afraid of anybody. You see what good care my ostrich takes of me. You had better talk about this to my father. I daresay he will be home in the morning."

Jack's words were brave and bold, for he looked upon Otto as a beaten enemy. The German said no more, for Vickel made an angry dart at his uncovered head, and in his terror at the thought of a second attack, he turned and fled away as fast as his hurt leg would permit.

Jack lay cuddled by his darling Vic until the strange coldness had passed over, and his manful little heart had ceased to beat so wildly. The glorious brightness of the moonlight had given place to a chill creeping mist. It was the dreariest hour of all the night, but it was bringing back the day. After a while the mist began to lift, and the morning sun arose in all its

splendour. Then Jack knelt down by Vickel's side, and clasping his hands together, poured out the fulness of his heart in prayer. The joy of his thanksgiving for his hair's-breadth escape, and the earnest cry for help and guidance, scarcely found utterance in words, for blinding, choking tears came at last to his relief.

The broken words, the gasping sobs, touched the heart of the Kafir groom, who had risen at daybreak expecting his master's return. As soon as the humming, droning song of the black dairymaid announced her presence among the milk-pails, he went across and told her "that poor lamb without a mother" was very sore at heart — wailing over the fate of the Black Antelope, he doubted not, for the white lamb from the fold was much loved by the dark hind from the upper veldt, as they both knew.

Then the dairymaid came and listened, and picked up a man's hat at the foot of the ladder. Gorya the groom took it and hid it in the back of his stable with a grin. He knew the owner of the hat at a glance, and muttered to himself, "What's he been up to here?"

Much pleased with Jack's sympathy for their fellow-countrywoman (for they both knew well how earnestly he had pleaded for her on the night of her offence), the two Kafirs would have gone to him at once but for Vickel's menacing glances, for she had settled herself in the door-way, and refused to stir for any one.

When Jack found the farm-servants were about, his

spirits returned, and he began to think over his night's adventure. How was he to explain what had happened to the Immerseels? In truth, he dare not say a single word to any one of them, for he could not make them understand, and then they would send for Otto to tell them what he was saying.

"Yes," thought Jack, "Mr. Otto sees this just as clearly as I do, and so he thinks he can do as he likes, as much wrong as he likes, and carry all before him with a high hand; but he cannot deceive me. He is a bad man. He came to steal this bank-note; I'm sure he did."

Jaek's reflections were cut short by the sound of horses' feet, and looking out of the door of his loft he saw the "oom" ride in, with Zyl behind him. He watched the party dismount, but the Blaek Antelope was not with them. To make quite sure that he was not mistaken, Jaek ran down his ladder and seized his friend by both hands, looking earnestly in his face. Zyl knew well enough what he wanted to ask, and replied to him and to Genderen, who was signalling the same inquiry from the window of her slaap-kamé, with a shake of his head, repeating the pathetic Duteh word "verloren" (lost). Genderen burst into tears. She did not appear at the early breakfast prepared for the search-party. Jaek went indoors with his friend, and breakfasted on mutton-chops, listening attentively to the conversation, and gathering its sense more from tone and gesture than from actual words.

Yes, the search had been fruitless. Zyl was sent off to bed, grumbling and weary. Feeling himself safe indoors, with the “oom” nodding in his huge arm-chair just opposite, Jack coiled himself up on Sannie’s sheep-skin, and was soon asleep. He was wakened by the sound of Tante Milligen’s voice, and a very solemn voice it was. He looked up and saw her standing in the door-way leading to the kitchen, with all her maids gathered round her, listening open-mouthed whilst she narrated something which had happened to herself in the night. Jack caught the words “Das ein nacht” (this very night), and was up in a moment. Had Tante Milligen sent Mr. Otto after all? Jack had become very skilful at pantomime by this time, so he ran up to her and asked, by looking very earnestly in her face and taking hold of her hand, if she wanted him? Tante Milligen shook her head.

“Das ein nacht,” repeated Jack.

She held up her hands and turned to her eager, interested auditors, who echoed back their mistress’s exclamation, each in her own peculiar fashion.

The truth was Tante Milligen had heard a noise in the night—a noise like thunder, she averred. It was just as if a heavy weight had been thrown down suddenly over her head. Like most of the females among the Dutch Boers, Tante Milligen, although a brave woman, was fearfully superstitious. A noise outside the house would not have frightened her half so much, even if it had proved to be another Kafir scare. But

this mysterious noise inside the house, what could it mean?

When Jaek came up to her with the traces of the night's excitement still visible in his pale cheeks and circled eyes, she only thought he had heard it too, and of course any child must be frightened. She was pleased that it confirmed her own experience, for one of those shameless Hottentots had positively suggested that she must have been dreaming.

"Slaap wohl?" she asked Jaek, who shook his head most decidedly. Having had that question put to him every morning during his illness, he knew what it meant, and did his best to make her understand he had not slept at all.

Overcome with compassion, Tante Milligen sat down on the nearest chair, and took the little English boy on her lap, giving him a motherly hug and calling her maids one by one to notice the blackness of the circles under his eyes. This was indeed treating him like a baby; but Jaek was not so aggravated by it as he had been when Walt laid him down on Sannie's sheep-skin, because it convinced him Tante Milligen would have interfered if she had had the least idea that Otto had been trying to frighten him.

Then Genderen came to fetch him. Tante Milligen said he would be better out of doors; besides she wished to keep the house quiet until her sons should awaken. Jaek took Sannie's hand and wandered about with her, keeping very near the farm-gate, for fear of meeting

Otto. Genderen was seated on the stoop, shelling pepper, ready for one of the maids to pound. Jack would willingly have helped her, but he was looking for Vickel.

His giant fairy was far too stately a creature to be overlooked, yet she seemed to have vanished. He thought of the day when he lost her before; but Genderen's fluffy charges were all safe with their respective mothers. Everything was as usual, only his own ostrich was nowhere to be seen. Could anybody have hurt his Vickel? Jack's blood was boiling at the thought. He rushed back to Genderen, and showing her a dirty feather his bird had dropped, repeated her own mournful word, "verloren" (lost).

But Genderen smiled reassuringly, and pointed in the direction of their own ostrich camp. At that moment the shepherd came out of the granary, and apparently thinking the farm-yard was deserted, began to pull about the loose straw at the bottom of the stack where Jack had taken his siesta on that unlucky day when he fell ill with the fever. The children saw him through the open gate, and the Kafir groom watched him behind the stable-door. His movements were awkward, for he was stiff and sore, and his hat was pulled over his eyes—his Sunday hat!

The girls began to laugh at the incongruity of his appearance. At the sound of their merriment, Otto left his search, and limping up to them, turned to Jack with a scowl, saying,—

“The “oom” has ordered that vicious bird of yours to be shut up as long as it is here. The cow-keeper has been telling him how it flew at Sannie.”

“Zyl can tell him more about that than the cow-keeper, and perhaps I could tell him more about last night than you did, Mr. Otto,” retorted Jack.

“See if I don’t take your English impudence out of you some of these days,” growled Otto.

Jack’s blood was up, and his prudence was nowhere, so he answered hotly, “Then you will just rouse the British bull-dog. Don’t you know he would die rather than let you or any man touch a rag that was in his care.”

“Oh, oh!” sneered the German. “And where is the brute to be found?”

“Here,” returned Jack proudly, laying his hand on his own heart. “I don’t imagine English boys were made of poorer stuff than a dog in his kennel; do you?”

XII.

WRITING TO GRANDFATHER.

IN another minute Jack's arm was round Genderen's neck, coaxing and entreating for something, she could not tell what. He took up one of the pepper-stalks and pretended to write on her pinafore.

"When would the schoolmaster come again?" was that it? Genderen counted the number of days upon her fingers. Ten more, and he would be due. But Jack persistently shook his head and wrote on. Thinking he wanted to borrow a slate and pencil, she led him into the sit-kamé and touched the door of the cupboard where their books were kept. This was right.

Jack murmured a grateful "Jah."

Genderen unlocked the door, and waited for him to point to what he wanted.

Jack's eye roved over the motley contents for a moment, and then his finger touched the inkstand.

Genderen gave a smile of intelligence, and putting her own pen in his other hand let him carry them off in triumph.

He knew that Otto was gone by this time, and that Zyl was still asleep, so he slipped unpereived into the garden and made a writing-desk of his friend's three-cornered seat. The hedge round Zyl's garden had grown luxuriantly, thanks to the diligent use of his watering-pot, so that no one could see what Jaek was doing behind it. He sat down on the grass and took out his treasure. It was all right, but the edges were wearing away. He read the lady's note again. It only covered one page of the sheet of paper. Jaek's eyes grew bright: with three pages of blank paper he could write a letter to his grandfather, and send the note and its contents to him. "He can find the lady. They are both living at Nottingham. To-morrow is the day for the post-eart to pass," thought Jaek, feeling his spirits rise like a bird at having found such a good way out of his diffieulty. Jaek had never written a letter by himself before. He had often put a little note to his grandfather into his father's letters. But then there was always his father to tell him if it were all right. Now he must do it all; for if he wore the bank-note round his neek another week it would drop to pieees, and if he tried to hide it anywhere else Otto would get it. So Jaek wrote on as well as he could:—

"DEAR GRANDFATHER,—Some thieves burned down our house, and father burned his coat getting me out of the fire, so he had to buy one of a stranger—a

young Englishman, who said he had got a coat he did not want. It was too big for him. It had belonged to a friend of his, and it was put with his luggage by mistake, for he left England in a great hurry. His friend said it was not worth while to send it back. Father and I went to the nearest farm, and he was to send the coat there. Father was going away with the waggon, but as I was ill he left me behind. The coat came too late for him to wear it on the journey, so I was taking care of it for him. And one day when I was ill in bed my ostrich tore it, only because it was in the way, and she wanted to come to me. Then I found there was a letter between the lining and the cloth, with a bank-note in it. I thought at first I had better keep it until father came back; but I can't. The people here are very kind to me; but they speak Dutch, so I cannot tell them anything. There is only one man who can speak English, and he is a bad man, and tried last night to steal the bank-note. I do not know what he would have done to me if my ostrich had not come to my help and knocked him down. She is the dearest, loveliest bird in all the world. I can't tell you how I love her. I have just found out this horrid man has got my ostrich shut up. I know what that means. He thinks he shall get the bank-note away from me when I have no big bird to fight for me. But he is making a mistake, for I am going to send it to you by the post. And please, grandfather dear, will you give it

back to the lady it belongs to, if she is still at Nottingham; and if she is not there now, you will be more likely to find her than father; and anyhow it will be safe. I will put all in this letter; the eard that was tied to the coat too, for I am afraid I should not write the names plain. I have no more paper, so good-bye, dear grandfather.

“Your affectionate grandson,

“JOHN TREBY.”

Jack dried his letter in the sun, and then folded the bank-note in it once again, and slipped it into the ragged envelope. He looked well at the eard, thinking that if he were the schoolmaster he should not like to have such a difficult name to spell every time he had to write a letter. Then he packed both eard and letter in a sheet of his *Illustrated London News*, and tied it up with the precious piece of string he had found in his pocket after the fire.

Oh, was not it a wonderful thing that he should actually have money enough to pay the postage. It was good of Zyl's uncle to give him that sixpence. Oh, how true it is that with the trial God sends the way of escape, that we may be able to bear it. Jaek thought of the night when his father had explained that to him—a Sunday night years ago. He had listened and remembered then; he was living by it now. Next the thought of what Otto might do to him in his exasperation, when he found himself baffled, came

over Jack like a cold shadow ; but he threw it off, exclaiming, "I comforted father when I reminded him of Christ's own words, 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' And ought not they to comfort me ? I won't be made afraid." He put back his precious letter into its case of rushes, and marched into the house with Genderen's pen and ink.

Zyl was just out of bed, and laughing heartily at the idea of beginning his day with dinner ; but for all that there was a cloud on his brow, for like Genderen and Sannie he was secretly fretting for his Kafir nurse, and sullenly resenting his father's harshness to her. So Jack's excitement passed unnoticed.

Van Immerseel himself was sorry for them all ; and hoping to divert his children's thoughts from the lost Intombi (as a Kafir girl is usually called), he told them he was going down to the ostrich-camp to collect the eggs, and that they should go too. Zyl should drive them in the cart.

The girls ran off for their sun-kappjes, whilst the boys packed the egg-baskets in the back of the cart. Jack was delighted, for he expected to find his Vickel there. He had often seen the Boer's men loading this cart with barley quite early in the morning, and he guessed very shrewdly that it was to feed the ostriches.

Jack's great question now was how to get his letter to the post-cart. And in this discovery he found a key to unlock his difficulty.

Van Immerseel was mounted on his favourite cob. Like most African farmers, he preferred riding to walking when he visited his ostriches, because the presence of a horse has a very quieting effect upon these feathered giants. He rode slowly, whistling a favourite tune, whilst the cart rumbled over the stones at a little distance.

When they reached the camp, Van Immerseel left the girls outside, but he took Jack upon his horse and showed him Vickel, very happy and content in the midst of her feathered kin. Zyl marched boldly after them with a basket on his head, until they came to the nests. Here the Van dismounted, and was soon in high good humour with the number of beautiful eggs he was able to collect. Jack was very quiet and very attentive, watching eagerly everything that went on around, not a little pleased that Van Immerseel trusted him to hold the bridle of his horse whilst he was busy after the eggs.

When they returned, Van Immerseel let both the boys ride at once, whilst he led the cart himself very carefully. Jack was happy, for he had worked out his plan, and not one of his Dutch friends imagined for a moment that his joyous laugh, as he rode behind his friend, was the effervescence of such a desperate resolution.

When they reached home, Jack employed the rest of the evening in making a hood for Vickel out of his pocket-handkerchief—something after the fashion

of a carriage-hood, so that it might let up and down. He had saved a handful of the strongest rushes they had found in the ravine. Genderen supplied him with a needle and thread. He folded his handkerchief cornerwise, and made runners for the rushes across it at even distances. It was easy to draw it into shape and sew the rushes firmly together at the ends. He had torn off the hems of the handkerchief to serve for strings, and when these were sewn on his work was completed.

When one of the Hottentot maids fetched him indoors to supper, he took the opportunity to entreat Tante Milligen to let him sleep indoors. She was quite prepared for this, and understood him easily. So she put him in bed with Zyl. And when Walt joined them, an hour or two later, a nice time they had of it. With fever and fretting Jack was as thin as a little skeleton—a perfect shrimp in Walt's eyes, who insisted upon putting Jack between them, for fear he should kick him out of bed in his sleep without knowing it. When sleep visited his two Dutch friends it was banished from Jack's eyelids; for snoring followed in its train, and every time the two young giants stretched themselves or rolled over he thought he should be crushed. So he passed the greater part of the night sitting cross-legged on his pillow.

With daybreak Walt arose, and Jack followed his example, for he was gasping like a little fish for air;

but Zyl, who had not yet recovered his lost rest, was sleeping heavily. Walt perceived poor Jaek's condition, and did not wonder at his determination to escape to the fresh, cool morning air outside; so he let the English boy accompany him to the garden, where Walt was soon too hard at work to take much heed of his restless companion.

As soon as the farm-yard gate was open Jack went in, and seating himself at the door of the granary, waited for the arrival of the ostrich-cart. When he heard the droning hum of the dairymaid's song he ventured to her door and begged a cup of milk. The balmy air of the Africane dawn was breathing new life into every vein. It seemed an easy thing to him then to scamper over the veldt on Viekel and meet the post-eart; yes, and be baek again almost before anybody could miss him.

The eart was eoming for the barley. Jaek was at his post in a moment. The "oom" himself had taken him to see his bird the night before, so the men about the yard, who had found Viekel guarding the door of the loft morning after morning, thought it quite natural Jaek should want to go and feed her.

The drive through the morning air raised Jack's spirits, and he joined merrily in the Kafir's song, catching the lilt and humming the tune when the queer-sounding words escaped him.

A deafening seream from the ostrich-camp greeted their arrival. The hungry birds were crowding round

the gate, crying their loudest for breakfast. A hundred open beaks and as many impatient claws scratching up the sand looked somewhat formidable. Jack filled the crown of his hat with barley, and as soon as the gate was unlocked he waved it high in the air, flinging the grains of corn far and wide. The feathered phalanx was dispersed in a moment. The tall, towering necks were bent to the ground with a meek gobble, gobble.

“They are nothing but big poultry after all,” laughed Jack.

The Kafir laughed too, and invited Jack to enter; but he preferred remaining by the gate, whilst the Kafir went in with his sack of barley on his shoulders.

While the man was thus engaged, Jack called, “Vic! Vic!” but at first there was no answer. Jack raised his voice, and looked around. He soon found her, for the other birds would not suffer the stranger to eat with them at present; so Vickel was hovering round and round the busy group, fain to content herself with a solitary grain or two snatched desperately between her companions’ feet. At the sound of Jack’s call she ran towards him with a crow of delight. He had kept some barley for her in the crown of his hat. A few grains flung towards her again and again soon separated her from the other ostriches. Jack softly opened the gate, and by showing her the barley still left in his hat he tempted her to follow him out. He shut the gate behind them, emptied the remainder of

the barley on the ground, and whilst Vickel devoured it eagerly he sprang upon her back.

Away on his winged steed, away like the wind, across that sea of glowing sand they flitted like a light-gray cloud, circling round and round in their rapid flight. Never before had Vickel tasted the full delight of perfect liberty on her native veldt. She arched her graceful neck and shook out her curling plumes to the morning breeze in a whirl of mad delight, as if she were a willing participant in her master's daring scheme.

Pursuit was impossible ; nothing could overtake them now. Vickel scarcely touched the ground as she skimmed across the mighty plain, balancing herself with her outspread wings, with an easy, graceful movement that was neither running nor flying, but swifter than the swiftest racer that ever won the Derby. The speed at which they travelled almost took away Jack's breath.

He was delighted with the success of his manœuvre. The ease with which he had been able to manage the starting encouraged him mightily. Through the clear African atmosphere Jack could see for miles. He had so often watched for the post-cart by his father's side, and had been the first to perceive the little cloud of dust darkening the horizon line, he could not miss it now.

XIII.

HOW THE LETTER WAS POSTED.

JACK did not miss it. After an hour or more of anxious watching, the rolling cloud of dust appeared, but it was going from him. In an agony of desperation, he put his hand to his head to try to think. Yes, there was the post-cart almost out of sight, and altogether out of hearing,—nothing but a moving speck of cloud. No one but himself, thought Jack, would have been sure that it was the post-cart. No power on earth could make Vickel run in a straight line. He saw it now, as she circled round and round, he had lost his way.

His heart beat wildly, his breath was almost gone with the terrific speed, when a crystal gleam in the glowing sand attracted Vickel. Easy as it is for an ostrich to go without water in her native deserts, she loves it all the same; and now of her own accord, Vickel stopped to drink. Jack got down and drank also: the water was warm with the growing sunshine. Then he sprang upon her shoulder once again,

and she waded through the little stream with infinite satisfaction.

When she stepped out again on the opposite bank, she shook the water from her wings, and covered Jack with a light and glistening shower, which both steed and rider felt infinitely refreshing.

Jack took the hood he had made out of his pocket and tied it on his ostrich. It answered well; he could let it down over her eyes and stop her when he liked. He gave up all thought of trying to make her run after the post-cart. But he had watched the way it was going, and now he started his ostrich in another direction, hoping as she circled round he should fall in with it further on.

Away went Vickel with renewed speed, taking a wider sweep as she felt her capabilities expand with this unwonted exercise. The pace at which they were going was frightful. Mr. Wilton and his powerful grays crept like snails in comparison.

Jack was dizzy and sick, when suddenly he found himself, not behind the post-cart, but before it. Vickel was turning from the storm of dust it raised, when Jack let the hood drop over her eyes. She stopped at once, and Jack hung round her neck, more dead than alive. But he knew the critical moment had come; yet it was a mercy he had a breathing-space, or he might have fainted quite away. Vic was frightened at finding herself in the dark, so she lay down and ran her head in the sand, trying to rub

her hood off. Jack stretched himself on the ground beside her and slowly rallied.

Great was the postman's astonishment when he perceived the little fellow, covered with dust and white with fatigue, sitting by the wayside waiting.

Jack got up as the tramp of the horses drew nearer and nearer. He waved his hat in the air and held aloft his precious letter. The postman drew up.

Jack put the letter and the sixpence into his hand ; but his voice was weak and faint, as he asked nervously, "Please, sir, is that enough for the postage ?"

The postman took the letter from him and read the familiar address. Every time he had crossed that sandy waste for years, he had been stopped to take a letter for Mr. Treby, Nottingham, England. He looked Jack all over, as he said kindly, "You have had a long and dusty walk to overtake me here. It has been too much for you, my little man. Your letter shall go all right. Where is your father ?"

"He is gone on a long journey, sir," answered Jack dolefully.

"Then keep your sixpence ; I will give you the stamp. But do not try to walk back in the heat, or you will drop by the way. Lie down under one of the bushes and rest. Have you anything with you to eat ?"

Jack shook his head. "I'm not hungry, sir."

"Hungry ! no," repeated the postman ; "you are past that. Why did not you send that letter by your

father's man — the old fellow was waiting by the kopjee for the parcel I promised to bring your father—eh ? ”

“ Please, sir, I came from Jaarsveldt,” put in Jack.

“ Jaarsveldt ! ” exclaimed Wilton in astonishment ; “ that is miles and miles away. You must not think of trying to go back there alone ; you are a great deal nearer your old home. Keep to my tracks until you come to the kopjee, and then I think you will be able to find your way, for I have often seen you there by your father's side watching for my coming. Now mind what I say, and eat this,” the postman continued, taking out his pocket-flask and pouring some of its contents over a piece of captain's biscuit.

Jack found it wonderfully reviving. One of the passengers who had been listening to the conversation threw him a bit of bultong—that is, meat cut in strips and dried in the wind ; and a hand was stretched out from the inside of the cart with a nice slice of water-melon. Jack lifted his big hat and bowed all round.

Wilton reiterated his charges.

“ Please, sir,” said Jack earnestly, “ I am not alone ; I have got my ostrich,” pointing to the hole where Vic still lay, with her head well buried in the sand, in a paroxysm of fear on account of the horses.

Jack wondered why the men all laughed. He promised faithfully to do as he was told ; and away drove the post-cart, leaving him in that vast solitude

once more. He watched "Her Majesty's mail" crossing the wild desert plain until it vanished to a dusky speck.

The rolling sand on every side surrounded him like an earthy sea, for it was driven in wave-like heaps by a sudden gust. An ice-cold wind was driving before it a cloud so dense and black Jack trembled, for he knew that thunder was lurking in its inky folds. He ran to Vickel, who was rallying her spirits, after the apparition of those prancing horses, by browsing among the rosemary bushes. She too had felt the change. A little black and white bird flew fast from ant-hill to ant-hill, seeking shelter from the coming storm.

Vickel began scratching a hole in the billowy sand with unusual vehemence, as a troop of eland deer rushed past within a dozen yards of the rosemary bush she had been munching. Jack crept in terror to her side, as the "velderbeeste" dashed madly on, and the first fierce lightning-flash parted the blackening gloom.

Jack gave one cry—he could hardly help it—as the thunder crashed and rolled above his head. But his faithful Vic's broad wing was spread above two heads instead of one, as the bird and the boy huddled together in the hole she had been scooping.

It was an awful moment. Down came the heavy drops of thunder-rain. The tall grass waved and shivered. Aroused by Jack's wild cry, a quaint black



HER MAJESTY'S MAIL.

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figure crept cautiously out of a deserted ant-bear's hole, with which the ground was honey-combed, and looked around. Another and another jagged flash compelled her to fling herself on the ground to escape its fury.

Swiftly as the storm had arisen, so swiftly did it pass. Beyond the angry clouds a bright-hued rainbow spanned the wide reach of sky and kissed the crimsoned sand, that seemed to glow with a deeper red when the brightness of the golden sunshine was withdrawn.

To Jack's surprise Vickel began to hiss. He parted her feathers with his fingers and looked cautiously around. The storm was dying, but every leaf was glittering with its sparkling diamond drop. The thirsty earth was already rejoicing; the very flowers seemed whispering, "Rain, more rain," as they lifted their drooping heads in grateful gladness.

The black had raised herself on one elbow, and was gazing earnestly at Vickel's damaged plumage. Those singed wings could not easily be mistaken. Like the hum of the wandering bee her song arose:—

" Lamb without a mother, where, oh, where?
 Bird without a heart,
 To leave the fair 'umfana' and depart;
 Or was the hard, hard casa hard to thee?
 And did he force a faithful bird to flee?"

Jack sprang to his feet and rushed towards the singer. The voice was the voice of the poor Black

Antelope. He could have recognized that song had they met at the ends of the earth.

"Umfana," repeated Jack, catching the sound of the one Kafir word with which she had made him familiar. "Why, that was what she always called me, and Zyl was her 'umdanda,' now I recollect."

To make assurance doubly sure, Jack shouted, "Here's your old umfana."

"Ou ka! (oh no)," cried the Black Antelope, springing to her feet, for she began to think the bird was talking; she could see no umfana (child) or umdanda (boy) anywhere.

Her frantic gesticulations, her wild cries, set Jack off laughing. She began to tear her hair, declaring it was a spook (a bogle) that was mocking her.

Up rose Vickel with a screaming hiss, leaving Jack tumbling in the sand. The next minute he found himself half hugged to death in the fervid embraces of the Kafir nurse.

"You did not expect to meet a six-foot hen with a two-handed chick, now did you?" asked Jack, kissing her fondly, as he felt her bony arm.

How sorry Jack was he had eaten all the food Mr. Wilton and his passengers had given him, for he was certain the poor girl was really starving. Like Vickel, she had been eating rosemary leaves. But her delight at finding Jack made her forget her own sufferings. Yet, yet, she asked, why was her pet-lamb straying on the veldt? It was well they had

met, for the homeless dog, as she called herself, could guard the lost lamb and save him from destruction. She drew him to a safer spot, and sitting down beside him, watched the parting clouds, for the lightning had not altogether ceased, and the thunder still rumbled behind the low sand-hills. Overhead the sky was clearing, and the arching rainbow shone with brightened hues. Jack leaned against his Kafir friend, while Vickel strutted about, drying her feathers in the transient gleams of the returning sun. The air grew fresh and reviving. The sleep the postman had so earnestly recommended to Jack fell upon him unawares.

The Black Antelope had noticed at the first glance that her lamb had been shorn of his wavy curls, and now she perceived the traces of recent illness in his pale lips and hollow eyes. So she waited patiently beside him, flapping away the stinging flies with a long tuft of grass, that his sleep might be unbroken ; and so the weary hours passed by.

When Jack at length awakened, the darkness of night had gathered around them. Vickel was roosting in the sand at their feet ; but the glorious stars of the southern hemisphere were shining forth in all their splendour.

“ There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard,” thought Jack as he looked into the Kafir’s eyes and then pointed upwards to their glittering light, and began to sing,—

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on !
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on !”

Oh, how she listened. The solemn stillness of the night oppressed them both. Jack was almost afraid to think, and altogether too proud to cry ; yet in spite of himself a something rising in his throat choked his voice.

“Have I done wrong to venture here alone ?” he asked. “I almost wish—but no—” He checked himself. “I won’t mind, for I’ve done it. The letter is safe on its way to grandfather. Oh, if I could only have asked father what I had better do.”

Then the sweet words of his hymn came back to him ; and kneeling down amid the eerie, lonesome waste, he took the Black Antelope’s hand in his, and coaxed her to kneel beside him as he repeated aloud, “Our Father.” Yes, her Father as well as his, if she but knew it. Yet his prayer was for them both, as she dimly felt.

Jack had poured forth all his troubles, and his heart was lightened. They could do nothing but keep just where they were until daylight. “And then,” thought Jack, “I shall see the tracks of the post-cart, and I’ll take the poor Black Antelope home to Tottie ; for all her trouble came through her kindness to me. It is hard when trouble comes through trying to do right.”

Then sleep came slowly back again, and Jack was dreaming of the home he could not find.

At the peep of dawn he rose and began searching diligently for the track of the post-cart. Alas, alas ! he could not find it. How was it ? Had they wandered unconsciously from the spot ? or had the storm obliterated the deep wheel-ruts ? He could not tell.

Jack tried to explain to his companion what it was that he was searching for, by drawing lines with his finger in the sand.

Both were faint for want of breakfast, and soon grew tired. The eagerness with which Jack had started on his fruitless search had dwindled to a lagging walk ; but not one vestige of a cart-track could be discovered. Then he sprang upon Vickel, who had made her breakfast on the scrubby grass as she loitered after them. Jack arranged her hood and bridle, and then invited the Black Antelope to mount beside him. Vickel was now so strong she could have carried a man on each shoulder with ease. She thought nothing of her added burden, and ran off as gaily as on the preceding day. She, at least, was in her native element, and every now and then turned a loving look to her master's face as she took a wider sweep, scouring the mighty plain in every direction.

At last the Kafir girl's quick eye detected the welcome lines ridging the wavy sand. She pointed them out to Jack with a cry of joy. The track of the post-cart at last, thought Jack, as he dropped the hood over Vickel's eyes and jumped off. But the Kafir was before him, running swiftly between the two deep ruts,

which nothing smaller than the broad wheels of a heavily-laden waggon could have made. Jack was thinking only of the way home ; but the Black Antelope, with her larger experience of all the ups and downs a life on the veldt embraces, knew that the tracks could only be a few hours old, for the hoof-marks of the oxen were not yet effaced. She noticed them carefully to find out which way the waggon had gone ; not that she wished to follow it, but she shrewdly conjectured that a few miles the other way they should find the spot where the waggon-driver had out-spanned for the night. Perhaps a waste crust or a half-picked bone might be dropped beside the ashes of his fire. She beckoned Jack to follow her ; for he had paused, waiting for Vickel, who seemed wonderfully busy scratching about in the sand. At last she sat down in it.

So unlike her, Jack thought, as he went back to call her. The fear of losing his ostrich over-mastered every other feeling.

But for once in her life she refused to answer to his call. Would his Vickel grow wild and forsake him if they kept on wandering about the veldt ?

At last she got up with an air of importance, and began scratching up the sand vehemently.

He went close up to her before he could rouse her. Then he saw she was covering something up. Oh, joy, joy ! his Vickel had laid her first egg !

He ran and picked it up. What a jolly egg it was !

almost as big as Jaek's head, now he had lost his hair. He was certain it must weigh nearly two pounds and a half. He thought she might have chosen a better colour, for it was a dirty white marbled over with yellow. Jaek took it up very carefully and held it up on high to show it to his companion. Jaek never forgot the cry with which she bounded towards him and pounced upon the egg.

Snatching up a sharp stone, she made a small hole in the shell, and began to suck the rich nutritious yolk. Then remembering herself, she held it to Jaek's lips, with a look so depreating that it stopped his reproachful "Don't, don't!" for he saw that she was famishing. He took a sip. The welcome nourishment revived his spirits.

It was life to them both. They shared it between them, each trying to make the other take the lion's share. Hungry as they were, there was more than enough to satisfy them.

"My best and sweetest! my ownie and good!" cried Jaek, as he kissed the breast of his snow-feathered queen, who walked beside him with added dignity.

The Blaek Antelope was right. An hour's walk brought them to the smoking ashes of a dying fire. She raked these carefully together with a bit of charred stick; and after signing to Jaek to lie down and rest under the nearest bush, she began to search about for fuel—a difficult matter on an African plain; an almost hopeless quest now, for the waggoner who lit

the fire had been before her. A few dead leaves under a bush that had been struck by the lightning, and a twig or two, were all that she could find. She returned to Jack, who was dozing in the sunshine, and made up the fire, little dreaming that it was his own father who had lighted it on his return journey. She wandered forth a second time in search of water, confident that she should find it somewhere in the neighbourhood of the traveller's fire. Vickel's egg-shell served her for a cup when she found a tiny runlet, glistening like a silver braid amidst the scorching sand. A dead bird lay on the ground, another victim of last night's tempest. Her cry of joy brought Jack to her side to taste the delights of a cup of sun-warmed water in the burning heat of an African noon.

Then she roasted the bird in the ashes for their dinner, content to let the morrow take care for itself; whilst poor Jack grew every hour more uneasy. He knew now they had lost their way. The track they had found was not the track of the post-cart; for he too had noticed the foot-prints of the oxen, so different from the mark of the horse-shoes. His only hope was in Vickel's sagacity. She might yet find her way back to Tottie's hut.

XIV.

LOST ON THE VELDT.

THE glories of an Afriean sunset were adding a more than usual radianee to sand and sky. Mr. Treby urged on his weary oxen as he came within sight of Jaarsveldt, with its long range of low farm buildings and smiling orehard.

The Kafir guide he had engaged to aeeompany him on his homeward route was ealling to the oxen.

Jack's father had had a most suecessful journey. He was returning with money in his poeket and a loaded waggon. Wilton, the postman, who had been the first to speak a word of sympathy on the morning after the fire, had not let his sympathy end in words. He had erossed Mr. Treby on the road as the mail went baek to Natal, and had lent him money enough to rebuild the house; for the postman, receiving his regular pay from Government, had more actual inoney in reserve than Mr. Treby's other neighbours. Mr. Treby had aeeepted the loan at onee, for he knew his aged father in England would help him to repay it. So all his plans were ehanged. The diamond-

digging was given up ; his waggon was bringing back beams and roofing, doors and windows—in fact, a skeleton house. The helping hand so unexpectedly stretched out had cheered his heart. As he drove up to Jaarsveldt, the “oom” was standing by the open gate. He turned away his head at the sight of his English neighbour.

“Where is Jack ?” was the father’s first inquiry as his eyes looked eagerly round, hoping to catch sight of his boy. The Kafir groom was hurrying to assist in the out-spanning of the oxen. All were running to welcome him ; and yet, and yet, every face was averted. Van Immerseel wrung his hand with a heartiness which threatened dislocation of every joint, and groaned.

“Where is my boy ?” repeated Mr. Treby, growing cold with fear.

The sturdy Dutchman paused blankly, then slowly pointed across the shadowy veldt. Somewhat reassured, Mr. Treby entered the house. Tante Milligen’s ruddy face grew white at the sight of their English neighbour. Genderen crept behind the door. The evening meal was preparing. With an added warmth of hospitality, the “tante” forced him into the “oom’s” big chair, and began to drive about her maids as if nothing their plentiful household afforded could be good enough to set before their guest.

During his brief absence, Mr. Treby had made a point of adding to his Dutch vocabulary at every

chance. He thought he had learned a good deal, but, strange to say, no one at Jaarsveldt seemed to understand a single word. In his despair he asked for Otto.

"Jah, jah," repeated Van Immerseel, and a messenger was despatched for the shepherd.

Mr. Treby concluded his Jack was away with the young Immerseels, for neither Walt nor Zyl was visible. A little comforted by this idea, he began his supper with the appetite of a hunter; but it suddenly failed him when Otto entered. The German's face was livid with conflicting feelings, as he assured the anxious father that Van Immerseel and all his family had been kindness itself to the boy, but the ungrateful young dog had run away and never been heard of since.

"My Jack!" exclaimed Mr. Treby, in tones of bitter anguish, as he pictured his boy dying of hunger in that vast sandy wilderness. "O God! what men are these, to have kept my sordid pelf and lost my child!"

The silent Dutchman met the agonized reproach in his tear-blinded eyes with a look of stolid compassion, as he directed the shepherd to tell him they had just returned from a fruitless search, and that Walt was still scouring the veldt in another direction with his dogs and the Kafir groom. They had done everything they could to find the child, but in vain.

Mr. Treby turned away his head, but he could not hide the quiver of anguish he was struggling to con-

trol. Tante Milligen rocked herself backwards and forwards; her husband rose from his seat and stood beside the unhappy father.

They knew they had acted generously and hospitably to the Englishman and his child, and they saw his heart was bursting with reproach and blame. Poor fellow! he was wild with grief! The "oom" would rather have faced an angry elephant in his lair than own to that doting father that they had lost his child.

"No more dread of you supplanting me," thought Otto as he looked from one to the other, and tried, by his covert insinuations on either hand, to turn grief into anger. He thought he should find it easy work to set the Dutch and English by the ears; and he might have succeeded, had it not been for little Sannie.

She had been laid to sleep in her usual corner, but the entrance of Mr. Treby had roused her. For a while she sat up and listened unnoticed by any one. Then she got up slowly, and walking deliberately to Mr. Treby she struck him on the knee, exclaiming in tones of severe reproach that at any other time would have made them all laugh,—

"'Ou big baby! 'ou cry! 'ou go look for poor Jock Trairbee. Sannie 'll be your voorlooper."

Away she trotted to the open door. Otto thought to fetch her back, but she fought him off, asserting,—

"Me won't have 'ou. 'Ou hate Jock Trairbee. 'Ou do that at him," she persisted, imitating the scowl and the menacing gesture of the shepherd. "'Ou don't want to find him; 'ou stay there."

Tante Milligen repeated the imperious command of her youngest born, and Otto resumed his seat, refusing to notice the idle prattle of a child. But no one echoed his laugh.

"God bless the baby! she speaks more sense than any of us," muttered her father.

As drowning men catch at straws, Mr. Treby exclaimed, "That child knows something; let us follow her."

"Ridiculous!" cried Otto.

"But it is true," retorted Genderen.

The two fathers went out. Otto would have followed; but Tante Milligen, who was a formidable woman when she was roused, being six feet high, and broad and strong in proportion, took the German by the shoulders and turned him round. But all her cross-questioning failed to elicit more than that the English boy had been impertinent and Otto cross. Yet no one was satisfied.

Sannie met her brothers at the gate. Their jaded horses told of the many miles of sand which had been traversed. Weary as they were, no one thought of rest. "Search" was the word with them all. Walt, who had taken Jack under his protection from the first, refused to give up hope. Van Immerseel took

Sannie in his arms, and leading Zyl aside, questioned him about Otto's behaviour to Jack.

Zyl remembered the morning when they visited the shepherd's hut.

"But," persisted Sannie, "it was Jock Trairbee's own knife. Me know it was. He cut my beauty letters."

"Run into the house, Zyl, and tell your mother not to let the shepherd stir from the sit-kamé until I come back," said Van Immerseel, as he strode off in his high-handed fashion to search the shepherd's hut. The knife lay upon the shelf, as the children had said. Mr. Treby knew it in a moment. After that night Otto's dismissal was sure; but they were no nearer finding Jack.

All this did not take place unnoticed by the Kafirs about the farm. With their acute power of observation on the alert, they were soon aware that the German shepherd was suspected of having a hand in Jack's disappearance. The little gifts which Mr. Treby had scattered among them the night before his departure were not forgotten, and many a dark brow scowled upon Otto. But in spite of Van Immerseel's threats and Mr. Treby's entreaties, Otto refused to give any account of his quarrel with Jack; and still the fruitless search went on.

Jack had not gone home—that alone was certain. Van Immerseel had sent over to the ruined farm directly the boy was missed. Seco and Tottie had

been on the look-out ever since. Mr. Treby never doubted Jack had lost himself trying to find his way to his old home, and therefore, like Van Immerseel, began his search in that direction.

One night, when they returned utterly disheartened, the Kafir groom walked up to the heart-broken father with a hat under one arm and a pair of boots under the other.

“Inkoos! casa! (master and chief),” said his countryman the guide, turning to Mr. Treby, “this man tells you to look for your child here.” Then he went on to explain how the big bird bellowed one night like a bull, and the shepherd’s hat was found at the foot of the ladder leading to the loft where Jack had slept, and the shepherd’s boots hidden in the straw.

Mr. Treby was distracted when Tante Milligen herself added her experiences to the mystery of that night, and how Jack tried to make her understand he dare not sleep alone again.

How was Mr. Treby ever to find out the truth about his lost darling amidst a confusion of tongues he could not understand? Ah, but if he could not comprehend the jargon around him, Seco would; so he determined to start at once and fetch the trusty old Hottentot to his aid. What would he have given for one sympathizing countryman? He thought perhaps the reckless young schoolmaster would be coming again. But no; Tante Milligen had sent a message to delay him. She was not going to pay for nothing;

and what could the children learn while their hearts were aching for their lost companion?

Mr. Treby bought a horse of Van Immerseel, and started on his homeward road. He felt as if he had grown to be all ear and eye as he trotted across the lonely veldt. When he drew near the blackened ash-heap that had been his home, he said that the joy of his life was quenched beneath it, and his tears, when there was no eye but God's to watch him, rained freely down. But hark! there was a sound—a deep, hoarse boom. Surely he knew it.

“Vic! Vic! Vic!” he shouted, spurring his horse forward in the direction from whence it came. Out ran Tottie from her tumble-down hut; up sprang Seco from the mat where he was dozing. They had all heard it. “ ‘Tis as I said,” he exclaimed; “the ostrich is drawing home.”

He caught up a calabash of mealies, out of which Vickel had so often been fed, and scanning the vast distance, where sand and sky melted into one, he shouted joyfully. There was something moving on the veldt, like a small gray cloud at first, but gradually shaping itself into outstretched wings.

Mr. Treby got off his horse, and tied it to a shrub of prickly pear, for fear it should scare away the returning bird.

Nearer and nearer still it came, louder and louder grew the master's call. The three stood breathless, afraid of driving back the vagrant bird if they con-

tinued running towards it. But what was Mr. Treby's dismay to perceive a grinning Kafir face peering over Vickel's shoulder, when a wild cry of "Father! father!" echoed through the evening stillness.

"Jack! Jack!" responded Mr. Treby, darting forward like an arrow from a bow; but Seco, exerting all the speed of a wild hunter, outran him, and placing the calabash full in Vickel's sight, brought her to a standstill. Mr. Treby saw nothing but a little sun-burnt skeleton stretching its arms towards him. Could that be his Jack—his handsome Jack? Another moment, and bird and child and Kafir were caught in a grasp so tight, Jack could only gasp out, "Father, she has saved me." For Seco had seized upon a large stone to hurl at the poor blackie's head, believing she had stolen their darling to make "mouti" (medicine) from his heart and brain, according to their wild Kafir ways.

But at Mr. Treby's word the stone rolled back upon the ground. Between them the two men guided Vickel home, while Jack poured out his story to their delighted ears.

"I only wanted to post my letter, father; but somehow I could not get back," he pleaded pitifully.

"Jack," retorted Mr. Treby, "how could you, how dare you, run so great a risk? Hadn't I charged you to take care of yourself, my boy? Don't you know you are my very life, my precious boy? You've had a hair's-breadth escape;" and at the thought of all

the perils his child had undergone, a sort of sob choked his words. A huge hug finished all he meant to say, and drowned Jack's promises.

“Father dear, I will take care, only you see—”

And Mr. Treby did see, thinking in his fatherly pride and joy his boy was just the bravest and the best in all the world. “Only, Jack, you must learn to consider the consequences. Think of all we have gone through—just think.”

Jack did think; and truly his best way was to tell his father all straight and clearly as it happened. Mr. Treby's eyes flashed fire as he heard how Otto had treated his boy; but he never uttered a word to interrupt him, until Vickel tucked her long head under her master's arm, and looked up in his face with her beautiful eyes, as if she said, “I've brought him safely home.” Mr. Treby's head went lower and lower. Jack really thought he kissed his snowy queen. He was sure his father muttered, “Yes, yes, you've been his guardian angel—saved and fed him.”

“Yes, father; but I'm so sorry we've eaten all Vic's eggs, but the poor Black Antelope was so hungry.”

Then Mr. Treby turned and grasped the skinny black fingers, trying to make the poor runaway understand she should always find in him a protector and a friend.

By this time they had reached the hut, and he left her to Tottie's care, telling the old Hottentot to find

out, if she could, how he should best reward and serve the luckless girl.

“Buy her,” said Tottie coolly.

Mr. Treby threw up his hands in despair. “God help us!” he exclaimed. “See what it is to live among savages. Just hear her, *asking* an Englishman to buy human flesh and blood.”

“But you won’t send her back to Van Immerseel, father?” entreated Jack.

“There is not anything that I possess that I would not freely give her at this moment, and think it all too small, for I am very sure I owe your life to her and Viekel. But Englishmen make no slaves, my boy. Well, well, I shall have to do it though—buy her, and give her her freedom; that must be it. And then we can’t turn her adrift on the veldt; we must hire her for a while, and then we’ll see what more we can do.”

“That we will, father,” cried Jack, with brightening eyes, as they all sat down under the garden hedge. Seco had gone to his hut for milk and fruit for the famished travellers.

“‘For this my son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found,’ ” said Mr. Treby reverently. “Trouble springs up thick and fast,” he went on, with Jack’s head resting on his shoulder; “but trace it home, it is all of man’s making, and we should be crushed beneath its weight if there were not One above over-ruling all, and more ready to help us in our hour of need than we to ask.”

"But I did ask, father," whispered Jack; "and I think the Lord heard me."

"Never doubt it, my boy. Prayer is the ladder which reaches up to heaven, and it is always ours. 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning.' It was just that thought kept me up when my heart was breaking for you; and now—and now—Well, I have only to pour it out in thanksgiving."

"Both of us together, father," murmured the happy boy, as his eyes feasted on every dear familiar object the fire had spared.

XV.

MR. TREBY'S DINNER-PARTY

SIX weeks of hard work had passed away, and Jack's father had a roof over his head once more. He said it was the flood of happiness that overflowed his bounding heart when Jack was found, that enabled him to do twice as much work as he could at any other time in his life. Seco had been sent with the good news to Jaarsveldt, and brought back a pressing invitation for Jack to return there until the house was finished. But Mr. Treby shook his head. "No, no," he said; "we'll part no more. Come what may, we'll rough it together, Jack."

Yet Jack did often wonder what Zyl and Genderen and Sannie were doing, and wished the farins were just a little nearer, so that they might see one another now and then. Neither did Mr. Treby forget their kindness to his boy.

"I tell you what, Jack," he said at last; "as soon as the house is finished we'll have a grand day, and ask Van Immerseel to bring all his family to eat the first dinner in it with us."

Jack was full of glee. How he worked and slaved at the preparations—now raking out the rubbish from the garden, now helping his father with the carpentering, and busiest of all when his father trusted him with the paint-brush. An arbour was built in the shadiest nook he could find. The Black Antelope, with an apron of Tottie's tied over her scarlet blanket, was with Jack's assistance making herself a gown. There was not much to be said for its shape and work. Jack insisted upon it that it must have sleeves and a skirt; and the Black Antelope protested that the bags for the arms must be loose, or she should feel as if her arms were tied. She was learning fast a mixture of Hottentot and English, which Jack understood better than any one.

Life was running in the old grooves once again, except the watching for the English post. That had been altogether forgotten by Jack, and his father never spoke about the letter to grandfather which had almost cost Jack his life; for the thought of the poor child wandering in the veldt was more than he could bear. He could not talk about it yet; the very mention of it overcame him. But for all that the answer arrived by the return mail.

There was a thick letter for Mr. Treby, full of sympathy and consolation, assuring him his old father had sent him all he could spare to help him up the hill, and promising more by-and-by. Inside it there was another for Jack himself; and, odder still, a

third for Sandford Algarkirke. Mr. Treby was entreated in a postscript to forward this to the young man at once, if he knew anything of his whereabouts.

There was something also in Mr. Treby's letter about Jack, which made him look up with proud, astonished eyes and murmur a fond, "God bless him!"

But Jack neither saw nor heard, for he was absorbed in his own, quite overwhelmed, in fact, by the dignity of receiving a letter of his own. It read as follows:—

" MY DEAR LITTLE GRANDSON,—That was a wonderful find of yours. That a bank-note should be lost in Nottingham and found in South Africa seems to me little short of a miracle. As soon as I had read your letter, I took my hat and stick and off I went to Hawkswood Hall. It was a good step for me, but I managed it by resting a bit here and there. For my little grandson's sake, I determined to give the note into the lady's own hands. The servants told me she was just going out and could not see me then. So I took out the note you had found, and told them to ask her if it was not her own handwriting; and if it were, they might say something else had been found with it which I wished to restore to her. I knew very well it was, for I had had many a note from her about the coal-club I started in the winter.

" Back came the footman with, 'Step this way, sir;' and he took me into a large room full of pie-

tures and pretty things. There sat Mrs. Featherstone, with the tattered note spread out on a little table beside her. There was an eager look in her face that spoke of pain rather than pleasure.

“‘I can hardly believe my eyes, Mr. Treby,’ she began before I was well in at the door. ‘But where, where in the whole world was this discovered?’

“‘Where you would little think, ma’am—in the wilds of South Africa,’ I said.

“‘Was there anything in it?’ she gasped.

“‘Yes, ma’am—this.’ And I spread the bank-note before her. First she turned crimson, then white as death itself. I thought she was fainting, so I looked round the room for the bell and rang it sharply. Whilst the servants were coming, I hobbled to the window and got it open.

“‘Don’t!’ she gasped. ‘Only tell me all quickly.’

“‘As soon as you feel better, I’ll read you my grandson’s letter, and then you will know as much as I do.’ I took out my glasses and began to clear them; but she couldn’t wait that minute. She almost snatched the letter out of my hand, so I let her read it for herself. Presently she looked up.

“‘You must leave me this.’

“I shook my head over that. ‘Part with my grandson’s first letter! no, no.’

“‘Then wait,’ she implored, ‘while I send for Mr. Bourke. The loss of this note has made us bitter enemies. I sent it to him to head a subscription list,

but it never reached him. I charged his landlady with stealing it; he charged my messenger. Two innocent people have been injured—perhaps irreparably injured. And now here it is. Imagine what my feelings are. I can never express my gratitude to your grandson. You must tell me how I can best reward his honesty, his sterling honesty.'

"'He will find a rich reward when I tell him what you say,' I put in. 'Two innocent people cleared through him.'

"'Yes, through his courageous honesty. A man could not have acted more prudently. You ought to be proud of him,' she went on.

"'No need to tell me that,' I said. 'He is the very joy of his father's life. He'll make an upright, honourable man to take his father's place; for as the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.'

"Whilst we were talking, in came the clergyman and his son. I liked the lad's face. He was a big, broad-shouldered young fellow, fresh from a military college.

"'Is it found?' asked the young cadet eagerly. 'Broad as my back may be, it has felt the weight of the blame I have had to bear for giving the note to Sandford Algarkirke, when I ought to have taken it myself.'

"'We have both of us been wrong, Mrs. Featherstone,' said the clergyman gravely. 'You and I refused to believe this money had been lost; we both

agreed it must have been stolen. You fixed upon my housekeeper as the thief; and I, in my indignation at such injustice, determined to clear her by hunting out the real offender, and threatened to prosecute him, whoever he might prove to be. You persisted in believing Algarkirke's assertion, that he could not recollect what he did with the note, but as it was not in his pocket, he must have left it at my door.'

"'I warned him,' interrupted the soldier, 'he was likely to get into an unpleasant business, and begged him to try to remember. Like a coward, he took himself off to avoid the nuisance of the investigation. "The most foolish thing he could do," we all exclaimed. Of course suspicion fastened on him at once, and if he had set foot in England he would have been taken by the police.'

"'Now read this letter,' interrupted Mrs. Featherstone.—'I wish you would leave it with us, Mr. Treby.'

"I was obliged to consent. They all promised to take the greatest care of it, and return it safely, saying such handsome things of you, my Jack, that it brought the tears into your old grandfather's eyes.

"In the evening young Bourke called, and asked me if I would enclose a note for Sandford Algarkirke to my son; for since it appeared he had bought a coat of him, he might know where to find him, which none of them did. So I promised him you

and your father would do your best to find the foolish young fellow. Then he began to tell me how he was longing to reward my noble grandson.

“‘Gently, gently,’ I interrupted. ‘Gentlemen don’t take rewards for doing right.’

“‘Well, anyhow, he shall hear from us all, and that before long,’ he cried. So we shook hands most heartily; and I sat down to write this letter, and charge you never to part with that ostrich. What would I give to see you and your bird before I die!—Your delighted grandfather,

JOHN TREBY.

“*P.S.*—I have written to your dear father about all his troubles. Be a good boy to him, and keep his courage up.”

It was a happy moment for Jack when he laid down his grandfather’s letter; and a happier still for Mr. Treby as he ran his eye over the closely-written page.

“Well, well,” he said; “we’ll give the letter for that young scatter-brain to Van Immerseel. He is sure to be at Jaarsveldt before long. But we’ve some weighty matters to consider before our Dutch neighbours arrive. There is a haunch of elk venison to be roasted and a game pie to be manufactured between us; and it strikes me I shall make a better out of it than Tottie, although I am not a Frenchman. Anyhow, we must try.”

So to work they went, sunning themselves in

grandfather's letter. The great effort, the risk, the peril, had not been all in vain.

"But they little think of all that effort cost," added Mr. Treby, with a deep-drawn sigh.

"Never mind, father," whispered Jack. "Now it's all over let's be happy. Here they are!"

Jack pointed as he spoke to a lumbering vehicle, half gig, half cart, in which Van Immerseel was seated with his wife beside him, and Sannie, radiant in her Sunday attire, jolting on her mother's knee. Then came Walt upon his favourite hunter, with Genderen riding pillion behind him. Not a dozen yards behind them, Zyl was to be seen jogging along in the Hottentot's cart with the English schoolmaster.

"This is good luck, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Treby, as he ran out to welcome his guests. "Where's my voorlooper?" asked Mr. Treby, as he took Sannie in his arms and kissed her fondly; for his heart had gone out to the Dutch baby, when she struck him on the knee and bade him look again for his Jack when everybody else was giving him up for dead. But he was obliged to give her up to Jack, who rather shrank from meeting Van Immerseel, who roared out in his stentorian tones that he was coming to pay him for all his tricks.

XVI.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S GRATITUDE.

‘ I HAVE a note for you, Algarkirke,’ said Mr. Treby, when he had seen all his guests comfortably established — biped and quadruped alike enjoying the “good feed” he had provided in his hearty English hospitality.

The schoolmaster was in such constant request as interpreter that it was some minutes before he had a chance to open his letter. As it bore no post-mark, he concluded it must have come from some one in the neighbourhood. Possibly it held the promise of a future scholar; so he put it in his pocket to await some more convenient opportunity.

“ It is from England,” added Mr. Treby, in a low aside.

Algarkirke grew strangely pale, and crushed it out of sight. “ Not a word before these Boers; remember your promise,” he whispered, turning away from Mr. Treby to join in Walt Immerseel’s boisterous mirth.

Mr. Treby carved his venison in thoughtful silence,

whilst the whole family of the Immerseels did ample justice to his English fare.

When knives and forks were at last allowed to rest, and the great basket of fruit which Tante Milligen had brought with her was placed upon the table, Mr. Treby looked round for Jack.

He was expostulating with Zyl, who had taken the very best of the peaches on to his own plate, and then refused to taste them.

Jack was calling upon Mr. Algarkirke to find the reason why.

“Why?” repeated the schoolmaster laughing. “Because he means to plant them himself in your garden after dinner.”

“Jack,” said Mr. Treby, “come here, my boy, and tell your kind Dutch friends how sorry you are to have given them so much anxiety and trouble; and thank them as you ought for all they did to find you.”

“Father, won’t you speak for me? You’ll make them understand ever so much better than I can,” answered Jack coaxingly.

“No, no,” returned Mr. Treby. “Just tell them how you lost yourself, and why you went away, that they may feel you are not the ungrateful boy you seemed.”

“Please, Mr. Algarkirke,” asked Jack, “will you tell it in Dutch after me?”

Glad of any diversion from the painful surprise

Mr. Treby's words had awakened, and afraid of betraying his real feelings, Algarkirke assented readily.

Zyl, with his elbows on the table, greedily devoured every word with open mouth, as Jack recounted his adventures with Vickel in the sandy waste.

Jack did not like to tell tales of Otto to the Boer. He only said he wanted to post a letter to his grandfather.

Here Mr. Treby interposed with, "You need not mind speaking about Otto, for he has left Jaarsveldt for good."

The "oom" gave a low assenting grunt of satisfaction; and Jack went back in his story to describe the finding of the bank-note.

Up sprang Algarkirke, and seizing Jack by the collar he thundered out, "That coat was mine, and anything found in it should have been given to me. How dare you send it away, you wretched little rascal! I'll never forgive you, never!"

Jack was startled by the fury of Algarkirke's tones. Walt sprang to his feet, and Zyl doubled his fists, ready to punch the schoolmaster's head; but Jack answered toughly,—

"Mr. Algarkirke, you quite forgot I did not know where you were, and the bank-note was not yours; so I sent it to grandfather to give it back to the lady it really belonged to, and he has done it. You can read his letter if you like."

"I rather think you had better before you thrash my Jack," observed Mr. Treby dryly.

Jack pulled the letter out of his pocket and offered it to Algarkirke. Zyl and his big brother eyed him whilst he read, like two young bull-dogs preparing for a spring; but their indignation was somewhat appeased when Algarkirke flung down the paper and grasped Jack's hand.

"Am I dreaming?" he demanded. "By what magic have you done all this? Can it be true?"

"Why don't you read your own letter, Mr. Algar-kirke?" retorted Jack. "It came in grandfather's, as he says."

The bewildered schoolmaster obeyed. His note was brief:—

"DEAR SANDFORD,—Come back. The mystery is explained. Letters from Nottingham and remittances will await you at Pretoria. Return to us, and the past will be made up to you. I dare not write more plainly, not knowing whether this will ever reach you. But I snatch at the chance, for the man who bought my old coat of you may be able to find you out.—Your miserable friend, HORACE BOURKE."

"Farewell to Africa, and hurrah for merry England!" shouted Algarkirke, tossing the letter to the ceiling and catching it again, whilst the stolid Dutch faces around him stared in blank amazement. "Jack, Jack! you've been my good genius in very truth

Come along with me and I'll take you to England and make a man of you, my boy," he ran on.

"I rather think he bids fair to develop into that already, without wanting help of yours," observed Mr. Treby. "But how about this coat I bought of you? It's yours, and it's not yours, and I am earnestly requested in my letter of this morning to send it back to England."

"Horace Bourke and I were school-fellows," began Algarkirke. "We met one day at a village cricket match near Hawkswood Hall. One of the boys got hurt. Horace took his bat. As he pulled off his coat he threw it to me, saying, 'Take care of it for me, Sandford, for there is a note in the pocket for father.'

"While they were playing a bull broke loose from a neighbouring farm, and rushed into the field, scattering the cricketers, who ran for their lives, I among the rest. Horace snatched up one of the stumps and tried to drive the beast away. He shouted to me to fetch his gun. 'And give the note for father to one of our people, so that he gets it in time,' he added.

"Off I ran towards the parsonage. Before I reached it a thunder-storm came on. I threw his coat over my shoulders to keep myself dry. I got the gun, but forgot all about the note. Alarmed for his young master's safety, the gardener went back with me.

"When we gained the field we found the bull had been shot by its owner. I could not see anything of Horace, so I gave the man the gun and told him I

must borrow the coat to go home in, as it still continued to pour. Before I had a chance to return the coat, Horace wrote to ask which of his father's people had taken the note from me, as it had never reached him.

“I started up in a fright and felt in the pockets of the coat, but as there was nothing in them I thought I must have left the note with the woman who gave me the gun, but the scare with the bull had put it all out of my head. That was how I answered him. Then I went on a tour with an old chum to get rid of the bother. When it came out there was money in the note, and I was charged with stealing it, my mother was frightened out of her senses. She packed up my belongings, and Horace's coat with them; for he privately entreated her not to send it back, not to let any one know I had taken it home, as it would go against me. She charged me to prolong my tour, but not to send her any address. We only communicated under cover to my Dutch friends at Amsterdam, and that but rarely, so that I had begun to think I was expatriated for life. No one but my mother believed in my innocence, and she reproached me with having brought all this trouble on myself by my confounded carelessness.”

The “oom” blew a great whiff of smoke from his long clay pipe, and gave a nod to his sons that said plainly, “Are you listening to that, boys? Take the lesson home.”

Zyl flung a snort of contempt at his schoolmaster,

and kicked his heels remorselessly against the legs of Mr. Treby's new chairs.

Algarkirke went on impetuously. "But you, Jack, you are the best friend I ever had in all my life, for you have cleared me. When my mother knows what you have done, there will be nothing that is in her power that she would not do for you in return."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Algarkirke," interrupted Jack, mindful of his grandfather's words. "It was Vic found it, not I. I am only so glad to have been some good in the world already."

Genderen, who had been whispering with her mother, touched Algarkirke's arm. "Talk with us about that." She smiled significantly.

Mr. Treby glanced approvingly at his boy. "And even now," he thought, "Algarkirke does not realize what this has cost you. But he is a more wretched cad than I take him to be if I can't make him feel before we part the moral difference between a boy who asks himself, What ought I to do? what would be right? and then does the best he can, without a thought of the consequences, and a selfish fellow, who only wants to shirk all responsibility and back out of everything disagreeable. It may open his eyes and make a change in his own character, for after all it is character shapes our destiny, both here and hereafter."

Aloud he said: "Keep on with your story, Jack, while you have so good an interpreter as Mr. Algarkirke. The Van is growing impatient."

As Mr. Treby spoke, the worthy Boer was thundering on the table with his clenched fist to recall Jack's attention.

Jack did not want to say any more about himself. It seemed to him so like being his own trumpeter. He grew hot at the thought, but his father urged him on with—"Remember the poor Black Antelope. We may never have such another chance to reinstate her in her old master's good graces. You must plead for her, my boy. No one but you can do it half so well."

"Yes, father, I must, I ought, and I will," answered Jack, as Walt hoisted him on a chair, exclaiming, "Jah, Jah!" for he had guessed the purport of Mr. Treby's last aside. Zyl muttered an emphatic "Go it," a new English phrase he had picked up in the last three days, when Sannie appeared in the doorway, tugging with all her might at the scanty skirt of the unlucky Kafir.

It must be admitted that Jack's first essay at "tailoring" had not produced a West End fit. The grotesqueness of her appearance threw Tante Milligen into a fit of laughter. It was a happy moment. The pardon was granted before the pleading was well begun. Mr. Treby's Kafir guide, who, under pretence of driving Vickel away from Sannie, continued to linger round the door, began to gesticulate violently.

"Inkoos, casa," he began, in the picturesque language of his tribe, "lift up the bruised rosebud

these men have trampled in the dust, and give her to me. I've room in my kraal for just such a wife, and I've sheep and oxen to buy her with ; and no man shall wrong her any more, for the spear that stands in the corner of my hut would be swift as the lightning to strike him, and the heart which beats in my bosom beats only for her."

There was a softer glow in the downcast eyes of the Kafir girl than Jack had ever seen there before as his father answered,—

" She is free to go or stay as she chooses ; but if she goes with you, Madzook, it shall not be empty-handed. The brindled heifer, and the pail and the English churn which she so admires, are all her own. She will tell you how she watched over my boy, and she takes a father's blessing with her wherever she goes."

" She deserves all her happiness," said Algarkirke humbly ; " but it is not so with me. I see by Jack's face he is thinking of the night when he wanted me to speak up for her, and I would not, because I despised the low, black cattle, and hated myself to think a similar misfortune could overwhelm us both. I had no feeling for anybody but myself. I thought if I had tried to help her I should only let loose my own shame. It was better to stand aloof. And now I could wish my whole life undone."

" Cheer up," said Mr. Treby kindly. " Remember what I said to you when first we met. If the old self is dead, you may climb to a higher and a happier

life. You've had hard lines, my poor boy, and you never heard the still small voice that was whispering through it all, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.' But we must not speak of a day until we see its close; for Christ is ever with us, sowing light in the darkness, drawing good from evil, changing the curse into a blessing in his own good time."

And so they parted. Three days afterwards the Hottentot cart from Jaarsveldt appeared once more at Mr. Treby's gate. Mr. Treby recognized the cunning yellow face of the Jaarsveldt cow-keeper.

"What's up?" he asked as Zyl and Genderen tumbled out of the lumbering vehicle with more than their usual awkwardness.

They did not perceive Mr. Treby, as they were intently looking after something behind the cart. Zyl held a rope in his hand, and as Mr. Treby drew nearer he saw that he was leading a splendid male ostrich, with brilliant eyes and plumage of the purest white.

"Where is Jack?" they asked, as Seco hurried up to greet his countryman.

"They shall have it their own way," thought Mr. Treby. "I won't spoil the children's pleasure by interfering before I know what they are after." He stepped into the garden and sent Jack to meet his friends.

Seco stood by his countryman with his hands to his sides, laughing with all his might, whilst Genderen called up Vickel. She came slowly, with her head on

one side, eying the new arrival, which Zyl still contrived to keep well in leash.

Mr. Treby paused with his hand on the garden gate, for Genderen's slow Duteh, filtered through Hottentot into Jack's English, was amusing in the extreme. "Enough to make a cat laugh," he said.

"What have you brought your Speriwig here for?" shouted Jack in great glee.

"Never you mind," retorted Zyl. "Algarkirke's gone for good, and we shall all be dunces, I suppose."

"He thought a great deal about Vickel," put in Genderen, with her fingers in her mouth, of course. "You know you told him all his good luck was owing to her. He said he should send her a silver collar from England. Nonsense, we told him, what would a bird care about that? Get her a nice mate, and she will be as happy as the day is long. So he made a deal with father when they squared all up. He said if he had money enough to take him to Pretoria that was all he wanted. He was in such a hurry to be gone he left father to get in the money that was owing him for schooling at the off farms. And Vickel's to have Speriwig."

"Speriwig will get his own living browsing on the veldt, as Vickel does," added Zyl; "and if you have a brood of chicks, Jack, you need not mind."

There was a sly twinkle in the Duteh boy's eyes as he rubbed his hands together, and even Mr. Treby had to own it was cleverly done.

Sandford Algarkirke was beyond the reach of either thanks or refusals, as Zyl averred. Jack must pocket his English pride and let his Vickel keep her mate.

"It was all my plan," observed Genderen, her round face radiating with pleasure. "I was sure it would please Jack better than anything else; and now, if he takes care of his chicks, by the time he is a man he will have as fine a flock of ostriches as any farmer in Africa."

"Do you hear that, Jack?" said Mr. Treby, coming forward. "Like Whittington's cat, your snow-feathered queen will make you a wealthy man."

Jack drew a deep breath of gratitude and delight as he looked up in his father's face, exclaiming, "Oh, isn't it kind of Mr. Algarkirke? I always did like him very much, except when he called Sannie 'a fatted calf.' Why didn't she come with you?"

"Oh, Sannie!" grumbled Zyl; "you are never easy without Sannie."

As usual Zyl was right. Jack never was quite happy without her any more, and when the wealthy manhood his father had predicted drew near, he went one day to Jaarsveldt and brought her home a bride.

THE END.

